

**Mothers, Work and Childcare:  
Choices, Beliefs and Dilemmas**

**by**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**at**

**The University of Sheffield**

**School of Education**

**February, 2010**

**Volume I**

## Abstract

This thesis, *Mothers, Work and Childcare: Choices, Beliefs and Dilemmas* asks two questions:

- What factors are women in England likely to need to take into consideration when making employment decisions and childcare choices when their babies are under twelve months of age?
- What importance, if any, do mothers place on having carers in day care settings who 'love' their children?

The thesis begins by introducing the context and rationale for the study, including 21<sup>st</sup> century policies in England to encourage mothers to return to the workforce (HMT, 2004). A critical review of the literature explores three key themes: An historical overview of women in the workforce in the UK; Attachment Theory, and Policy perspectives in England since 1989. The thesis then discusses and justifies its life historical exploration of six mothers' decision-making about work and childcare. A four-staged process of meaning-making is used to analyse and interpret the women's life stories which are presented as '*Interpreted Narratives*'. Seven key themes emerged from the analysis: *Childhood, Decision-making about returning to work, Influences and Dilemmas, Expressions of Emotion, and Indicators for Change, Identity and 'Love'*.

Drawing on the data and key literature in the field three of these themes are discussed in detail: *Decision-making about returning to work, Expressions of Emotion, and 'Love'*. The thesis contributes to the field firstly by highlighting the experiences of six mothers when they made decisions about child care early in their children's lives. This rich data complements the extant literature which reports broader, quantitative and generalisable studies. Secondly, it identifies some of the complex decisions which women have to make when considering returning to work when their babies are young. Thirdly, the thesis explored the saliency of 'love' in the context of mothers' choices, beliefs and dilemmas around choosing child care and introduced the notion of '*professional love*'. Finally, the study has developed a four-stage process of meaning-making which could be applied in life historical research focusing on other topics.

The thesis argues that mothers of young children view the concept of 'love' as a crucial factor in deciding whether or not to return to paid work. An original facet of the thesis is its introduction of the notion of 'professional love' (the love of a practitioner for a child in his/her care) which, it is argued, needs further conceptualisation and exploration in early childhood education and care contexts. The thesis concludes that mothers' stories of their personal experiences are important and their decision-making is complex, involving compromises between 'ideal' childcare arrangements and 'real-life' choices of care.

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## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the numerous conversations and wise words from some very special people during the course of this research. Firstly, my most grateful thanks must go to the six mothers (and their children) who granted me the utmost privilege to enter their lives to interview them as the basis for my study. Lucy, Esmé, Amy, Martha, Ayesha and Becky, without your complete willingness to share your life-stories there would be no study. Secondly, my humble thanks go to my inspirational supervisor Professor Cathy Nutbrown who has taught me so much more than how to study at doctoral level. Thank you for your warmth and sincerity and for your consistent advice, support, supervision and integrity, all of which have never wavered throughout the research process.

I would like to thank my many colleagues in the School of Education for their thoughtful critique and encouragement, especially— Professor Peter Hannon, Professor Jackie Marsh, Professor Pat Sikes, Honorary Emeritus Professor Tricia David and members of the Early Childhood Education Research Group. Thanks are also due to the many students who during their course of study for the MA in Early Childhood Education have shared with me their thoughts and reflections on this research.

I am particularly indebted to three extraordinary people: Dr Kath Hirst, Dr Ann Clare and Dr Tony Alderton, who, despite their own busy schedules, cared enough to give up their valuable time to proof read my work.

Thank you to *all* my wonderful friends who have given me space to study and ‘time-off’ from socialising. Your support and loyalty has kept me going. Thank you for your understanding and for your endless patience.

Finally, thank you to my devoted family. To my amazing, wonderful husband Mic, thank you for your unfaltering love and support. Thank you for always being there and for never once reproaching me for spending so much time studying. Thank you to my dearest Mum and Dad for being such loving parents and for your inordinate amount of both practical and emotional support. Thank you to my step-son Mark and my daughter-in-law Kate for sharing your love, for bringing Matthew and Charlie into my world and for always helping me to see the lighter side of life. Finally, to my darling sons, Josh and Zak, thank you for your unconditional love and encouragement. Thank you for always believing in me and for giving me the confidence to persevere, for making me endless cups of coffee and for surrounding me with your love. Thank you for letting me share ‘*Me and my Boys*’ but most of all thank you for being you and for letting me be me. I am a mother, *your* mother and so, with all my love, I dedicate this thesis to you.

## CHAPTER ONE

To be hospitable to the nuances of life, it is no use treating the mind as an automatic camera; only by composing one's pictures and playing with light and shadow can one hope to see something interesting.

(Zeldin, 1994, p.440)

### 1.1: Introduction

I have chosen to begin this thesis with the words of Zeldin (1994) to highlight and privilege the place of meaning – making in this research. This study used a life historical approach to examine the policies, practices and relationships which underpinned and influenced six women's decisions about work and childcare when their babies were under twelve months of age. Chapter one, (section 1.1) provides an overview of the structure of the thesis and section 1.2 sets out the rationale and context of this study which addresses the following two research questions:

#### Research question 1

*What factors are women in England likely to need to take into consideration when making employment decisions and childcare choices when their babies are under twelve months of age?*

This question enabled me to identify the issues and dilemmas which mothers of babies and young children face and need to weigh up when making decisions about their own employment and provision of care for their children.

## Research question 2

*What importance, if any, do mothers place on having carers in day care settings who 'love' their children?*

I have sought to test out my developing ideas about the place of love in early childhood care and education. This meant sensitively probing the factors mothers felt were important when arranging childcare for their babies and when looking at the qualities of the adults with whom their children spent time with. It is this question which took me into a deeper exploration of the relationship of my own theoretical position (discussed in Chapter Four).

In Chapter Two I tell my own story as a way of articulating my positionality and justifying my approach to the research. My story stands apart from the data in the study, setting the scene for the later narrations.

Chapter Three is a critical analysis of the literature in three main parts:

- *An Historical Overview of Women in the Workforce* in England is divided into three sub sections and reviews the literature on: Women, work and mothering: current childcare choices in England and beliefs and dilemmas faced by mothers in the decision-making process about returning to work or not.
- *Attachment Theory and 'Love'* which is discussed in relation to seven key themes:
  - Attachments are Key
  - Love and Neuroscience
  - Providing for Quality in the Education and Care divide

- The 'Love Triangle'
  - Theorising 'Care' and 'Love' in Early Childhood Education
  - Love and Policy: Teetering on the Edge
  - Love and Kissing
- *The Policy Perspective* includes two sub sections which critically analyse the development of policies in childcare provision and women in the workforce in England.

Having established the political and theoretical positions prevalent in England in the early 2000's, Chapter Four discusses the methodological issues, the research design, ethical dilemmas and my concerns for the study in relation to the life historical approaches reported in this thesis.

Chapter Five presents a collection of six short stories, one for each of the women who participated in the study. These stories are my narrations, written from long interview transcripts of the interviews which I conducted. The stories which I have termed *Interpreted Narratives* are intended to stand alone, and importantly, they are my way of introducing each participant.

Analysis and interpretations of the interviews are presented and discussed in Chapter Six, which is a reflexive account of the process. It includes a discussion of theories of data analysis and the theoretical framework which I have termed a *Four Staged Process of Meaning-making*. I developed this by drawing on the literature, the *Interpreted Narratives* and from the 'troubling of the data' (St Pierre, 1997).

Chapter Seven provides a discussion of the findings with a reflection of the way in which the study was conducted and the limitations of the research design. Based on the findings of this study Chapter Seven suggests topics for future research. In the conclusion there is a discussion of what I consider to be the impact of the study in the wider context in relation to policy and practice. This forms, what I believe to be the contribution of new knowledge to research in the social sciences.

## **1.2: Rationale and Context to this Study**

In this section, I explain the rationale and context for the subject focus of this research study.

I am a woman in my late forties and as far back as I can remember I have been fascinated by the amazing capacity for learning and the abilities of small children, essentially babies. In my teenage years I seized every opportunity to gain experience with young children. I regularly baby-sat for many families in the small village where I grew up. I always knew that I wanted my career to involve working with the very youngest children. In the intervening years I have had what I would consider to be a successful career working in various roles in the sector of early childhood education. For the past twenty two years, I have also been a working mother. Throughout my career, I have held the view that deep sustaining, respectful and reciprocal relationships between adults and children are vital to children's holistic development. I have never sought to hide my 'love' of children or to undermine the love between the parent and the child. I consider when parents, usually mothers, have been able to recognise that my love for their child/ren does not seek to threaten or take away the love between the mother and the child but instead seeks to

complement it is the point, where mothers (and sometimes fathers) have been able to give me 'permission' to love their children, what I am calling, in this context, 'professional love'. As a mother, I always wanted the practitioners who cared for my children to love them. I was not jealous or upset because I did not believe my children could give 'my' love away to someone else.

In the professional roles I have held in the early years' sector, I have witnessed mothers' faced with decision-making regarding childcare solutions when deciding whether to return to work following the birth of a baby. The younger the child the more challenging the dilemma seemed to be. Of the many conversations I have had with mothers, the importance of close reciprocal relationships between the adult carer and the child has played a key factor in their decision-making. However, how the mothers' reached their decisions were in my experience complicated and unique to their individual circumstances.

In 1991 I became manager of large workplace day nursery in a small city in the South East of England. This was just after the introduction of the Children Act 1989 (DOH, 1991). In the intervening years, government policy encouraging women back into the workforce amidst changes to early years and childcare practice has been prolific (HMT, 2004). I observed time and again mothers faced with the same choices and dilemmas about their childcare arrangements and I became convinced that I was not alone in my view. My experience suggested to me that what mothers really wanted was for their children (especially their babies) to be loved by the adults who looked after them. Not the same sort of love the mothers themselves had for their babies but a different, equally important, type of love.

This study has not sought to generalise any findings but instead through the use of life historical interviews to investigate the deeply held views, values and beliefs of six participant mothers which informed their decision-making.

In the next Chapter I tell my own story: *Me and my Boys*.



## CHAPTER TWO

### My Story: Me and my Boys

#### Introduction

In this Chapter I present *Me and my Boys*; The narrative is intended to set the scene and context for my interest in the subject focus for this thesis and represents my positionality. The theme for this thesis was driven by my personal and professional perspective as a working mother employed in roles within the sector of early childhood education. I agree with Cole (2004) who in her research on *Mother-Teachers* suggests that ‘much of what I was reading related to my experiences as either a teacher or a mother ...’ (p.90). Not only have I experienced personal anxieties related to reaching decisions about childcare when my children were young, but in professional roles spanning a career of nearly thirty years I have witnessed other mothers face similar dilemmas about work and childcare.

The names of those included in the narrative are their own and I have gained informed consent for them to remain unchanged and to include them in this thesis. Clough (2002) suggests that narrative can offer a ‘deeper view of life in familiar contexts; it can make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar’ (p.8). Bertaux (1981) argues that the researcher has a place and a part to play in the telling of his or her own story in the context of understanding social relations and suggests:

We should tell stories; not only the life stories of various people but also the story of such or such a pattern of social relations, the story of a culture, of an institution of a social group; and also our *own* story as research workers.

(Bertaux, 1981, p.45 [emphasis in the original])

*Me and my Boys* is necessarily intended to be ‘up close and personal’ (Richardson, 2005, p.966). However throughout the narrative I have endeavoured to offer an

'ethical representation' (*ibid*) of my family, friends, colleagues, and to all those whose lives have been implicated in the telling of my story.

## *Me and my Boys*

'I hope it's a girl, I don't know what to do with boys' said my mother when I was pregnant with my first child. 'Oh it's easy, no different. In fact, you just have to love them'. I replied. That was twenty two years ago, since then four more male children have been born into the family.

I have two birth children – Josh, twenty one and Zak twelve years, Mark is thirty one and is my step-son. He has two children – my step grandchildren – Matthew, four years and Charlie, who is, as I write is two weeks old. I always wanted to be a mother and never dreamed that I would be a grandmother so early in my life. Having so many boys never crossed my mind but I have always been 'around' small children. I always assumed being a mother is something I would be good at, a natural even. After all, caring for and educating young children was what I had been trained to do. What I hadn't bargained for was the pain and the worry and the sheer frustration of motherhood. I can be completely irrational when it comes to my own children in ways that I never thought possible.

I was working in a nursery when I became pregnant with Josh. I worked until the month before he was born. I caught mumps in the first few weeks of pregnancy and because one of the complications was a risk of hearing difficulties I regularly dreamed that my child would be born without any ears! I had a long, painful labour on the night of the hurricane in October 1987. I pleaded with the consultant to 'do something' and finally after thirty six hours, copious pain relief and foetal distress - Josh was born by emergency caesarean section. I didn't see him. He was taken to the special care baby unit because he had a 'headache'. I was told I had a boy and he

looked just like my dad. I don't remember anything else. Several hours later a midwife came to see me and I begged her to let me see my son. I waited for what seemed like forever until she came back. I was told I could look at him but couldn't touch him. I was distraught. What was wrong with him? I was convinced he had brain damage.

A few days later after his headache had subsided I was trying desperately to feed him. Still sore and unable to move due to the caesarean I was struggling to satisfy him. One of the evening midwives suggested I gave him a 'top up' bottle feed and she would take him to the nursery to let me rest. I reluctantly agreed and she assured me we would both feel better after a good night's sleep. The next morning I was rudely awoken by a stern faced ward 'sister' who told me I was a 'stupid girl'. In spite of the pain from my operation I sat bolt upright in bed. '*You will never be able to feed him now, fancy giving him a bottle*' she scoffed. The tears streamed down my face, how could I have been so selfish? One of the midwives brought Josh to me and I willed him to latch on to my breast. He soon did and fed contentedly from then on. Why is this story important to anyone except me? It's not especially, except to say, *I hate that woman!* I saw her many times over the course of time and our paths crossed professionally many times. I doubt she remembered my birthing experience and I certainly never reminded her. For me she was the epitome of everything I abhor in the caring profession and I had no respect for her. My experience - whilst unique - is of a type that many mothers have had (Sikes, 1997) and does perhaps say something about the mother child relationship and 'outsiders'.

Josh was about four years old before he was formally diagnosed with dyspraxia. I always knew that he was different from the other children I had worked with but no one believed me. It was a mixture of relief and excruciating pain to receive his diagnosis and I knew I should feel grateful that he wasn't severely disabled. But to be told his brain was in effect 'back to front and upside down' was so hard to comprehend. '*But he doesn't know any different*' said the consultant '*he doesn't know how we view the world*'. I knew they were meant to be words of comfort but in my heart all I knew was that my little boy's life would be a struggle because the world runs for the majority not the minority. I searched my soul for answers as to why he had dyspraxia and have always felt guilty. It must be my fault. Was there something that I could have done differently? Little was known about dyspraxia then.

After just three months' maternity leave I returned to my job part time. I had already gone back to studying three weeks after Josh was born. The class was only one night a week and I managed to express and freeze enough breast milk throughout the week for his father to be able to give him a bottle while I was out. I hated leaving him, I had post natal depression and it took all my resolve to carry on. I thought I was going to be sick the first week when my sister came to pick me up from class (I couldn't drive for six weeks due to the caesarean) and her car wouldn't start. Josh would need another feed and I knew there wasn't enough expressed milk. The knot in my stomach was agonizing as the vision of my baby crying was being played out in my mind as I knew *only I* could pacify him.

Working just four afternoons a week in the nursery seemed like a good idea when I was pregnant. But because I was in the 'biggies' section where I worked with the

three to four year old children, I needed to be ready to start work at one o'clock, I had to leave home at twelve noon and settle Josh in the baby room first. All the other children went home at half past four but Josh had to wait for me to finish at five o'clock. He was tired and I could hear him crying as the nursery practitioners including me were involved in our end of day chores. I wished I wasn't there but we were incredibly poor and I was doing everything I knew how to keep a roof over our heads as well as studying toward (what I hoped) would be a better standard of living.

The week before Josh's first birthday I was called urgently to the baby room. I arrived just in time to watch my baby have a febrile convulsion. One of the practitioners was standing next to the nappy changing station and was trying to hold him still. Knowing I needed to cool him down, my instinct was to plunge him into the bowl of tepid water that she had been using to cool him. He stopped fitting almost immediately and began to cry. As I hastily picked him up, I was shaking and sobbed uncontrollably as I peeled off his wet clothes. After spending a week in hospital the numerous tests revealed Josh was just one of those children more susceptible to convulsions brought on by a high temperature. Apparently unbeknown to us he had a slight chest infection at the time of the first convulsion which had been the underlying cause. For the next five years I never ventured out of the house without a bottle of Calpol!

When Josh was two years old my marriage broke down. In 1993 I married Mic and his son Mark then aged sixteen became my step-son. We had all been living together for three years and the relationship between the two children was strong and loving. In 1996 after years of trying for another baby we had given up hope when I became

pregnant. After another long and painful labour, Zak was finally delivered by Ventouse. My aftercare was a completely different experience and the hospital staff couldn't have been more caring or supportive. I can still vividly recall the respectful gentle nature of the surgeon who stitched me. He explained everything and despite the precarious nature of the situation (my legs in stirrups!) he treated me with dignity and respect.

I knew I had no choice but to return to work full time. We had a huge mortgage. I thought leaving my baby would be less traumatic this time, because as the manager of a large day nursery I was going to take him to work with me. It was to be different from when Josh had accompanied me to work all those years ago. This time as the manager I determined I *would* go to Zak when he needed me. (A practice I encouraged staff of the nursery to follow when they too brought their own babies to work with them). The seventy place nursery was owned by a charity and set up for hospital personnel. Even though I regularly worked beyond my hours at evenings and weekends my request to take some time back in lieu was denied as was my request for a reduction in childcare fees. The executive committee said they could not be seen to be giving me preferential treatment. Faced with no alternative, I didn't take any holiday that year and instead, combined the six weeks statutory maternity leave with my four weeks annual leave. I worked until the day of my son's birth and at the beginning of December, when he was just ten weeks old, I returned to work full time.

The practitioners managed to strike the balance between treating me as a new mum and being their manager. I found it difficult to shake off the fear that something would happen to Zak. There had been a series of high profile unrelated but especially

horrific child murders in the preceding years, James Bulger in 1991, Sarah Payne in 1993 and Megan Russell in July 1996 all of which I think contributed to my hypersensitive state. The night before I returned to work I spent a long time completing Zak's contact book. I wrote down everything including my irrational thoughts. However, because I didn't want the staff to think I didn't trust them, I wrote my notes in a jokey style as if they were from Zak. For example:

*My mum thinks that because I am so young that I am a typical candidate for the old cot death syndrome! Please forgive her if she is a bit paranoid about asking you to check on me so often while I am asleep. You know what she is like!*

One of the great advantages of being on-site was being able to continue breast feeding on demand. It was something I thought every working mother should have an option to do so I encouraged other mothers to do the same. The baby room staff knew the babies really well. Looking back, the key worker system that I had fostered in the nursery then was much more akin to what is now known as the key person approach. The key worker was able to anticipate when each baby would need a feed and ring the mother in time for her to arrive and feed her baby before he/she became distressed. On the whole it worked well for me, but there were times when I was faced with either breast feeding my baby in a meeting or declining attendance at the meeting. Either way, my employers were unsympathetic. I can recall even now the Chair of the committee saying to me just before Zak was born how embarrassed she was that her nursery manager was pregnant as it wasn't very professional and might put prospective parents off taking up a nursery place. I failed to understand her rationale.



At twelve weeks old and on the day of the nursery nativity play, Zak was on the point of being admitted to hospital with Bronchiolitis – a respiratory infection that affects young children. Although it is a common infection it can be serious, even fatal in small babies as it can lead to sleep apnoea. My deputy manager was supportive but again my employers were not. I was left in no doubt that they were displeased with my absence from the Christmas play. Once again I found myself in the invidious position of knowing that as the higher wage earner I had to maintain my job. I hardly slept that night for fear that my baby would die. My husband took the next day off work and in the afternoon I went to the nursery for a few hours. I could barely concentrate. I played down my son's ill health and to every parent and child I presented, as ever, as the professional.

Zak enjoyed his time at nursery and I knew that he was being looked after just a walk away down the corridor by Andrea. She was his key person. I worshipped that girl in every sense. She loved my baby I knew that, she was always pleased to see him and he reciprocated. She was so natural with him and she certainly didn't seem to be just trying to please me. I had known her for many years. She had been a student at the nursery that I had worked at when Josh was a baby and even then she just seemed to have a natural affinity with the children. They really warmed to her. Parents liked her too. We hadn't always seen eye to eye but we respected each other and always found ways to overcome any difference of opinion. So when she asked me before he was born if she could be my baby's key person I jumped at the chance. I had to be careful not to imply any favouritism, so I first checked out the views of the other baby room practitioners. If they objected they certainly didn't show it. During the next year Andrea became the centre of our world. She knew Zak so well, and I trusted her

implicitly. He crawled into her arms; she smothered him in kisses and she gently chastised him whenever he seemed to her to be fussing unnecessarily. The love between them was plain to see and I can honestly say I never ever felt a moment of jealousy. I was relieved and instinctively trusted her and so did Zak. If she was on leave or was ill we both missed her dreadfully and although the other practitioners were kind, caring and thoughtful, it just wasn't the same.

I was blessed with loving parents, however, my mother, who had never altogether approved of my being a working mother, frequently commented how difficult she found it to see her grandson being cared for by strangers. She was definitely jealous. As he got older and I was no longer breast feeding, the opportunity to reduce our childcare fees was an attractive offer. So we welcomed my mother's suggestion for Zak to spend some time with her. It also meant that Zak would benefit from a one-to-one relationship and I could concentrate on my managerial duties, as at the beginning and end of the day when staff were either coming on, or going off, duty was when Zak needed me the most. It wasn't his fault that we had to leave home at six in the morning or that we were the last to leave at six thirty in the evening. My hours had to coincide with the nursery operating hours. My husband worked long hours too and so the childcare was left to me. 'Grandma Days' became the perfect solution on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Monday, Wednesday and Friday were Zak's nursery days. My life was still complex. I had to organise after-school care for Josh and comfort Mark following the break-up of his long term relationship with his girlfriend. I continued to study and had also taken on some supply teaching at the local college of Further Education.

My experience as a mother is hardly unique, except to me, but it provided me with a window onto the feelings and experiences of parents, particularly, mothers, when they had to leave their children and go out to work. I really *did* understand how hard it was to concentrate on a meeting agenda while being aware that breast milk was leaking onto clothing which would give away the fact that a young child was due a feed.

I didn't judge the mother that rang five times a day. The first phone call was to check that she had put the nappies in her daughter's bag, the second was to check she had included her child's favourite toy and the third time was to check she had remembered to tell her special adult that her baby had been a littler fretful the night before. I understood that all those things were important but also guessed they were a disguise for what really mattered. What she *really wanted to know* was whether we *knew her* daughter and could *we* tune into her needs. Much of my professional role was spent listening to parents, children and practitioners. I felt privileged to think they could turn to me for advice and support or just be someone with whom they could share the burden of being a working parent.

It was a challenge to strike the balance between professional and personal.

Sometimes I had to raise difficult issues such as collecting a child on time, or I had to invoke penalties for overdue or late payment of fees and yet I still had to be able to empathise with a parent who had been awake all night with twins who were teething. I had to ensure flexibility of childcare to coincide with the work schedule of a father whose wife was terminally ill without impinging on the quality and staffing ratio of childcare for his or the other children for whom I was responsible. Then, when the

day of his wife's untimely death arrived (she was the same age as me) I had to support the nursery practitioners in their grief and help them to find ways to continue to support the family. On another occasion I helped a mother settle her toddler son in the nursery knowing she was going into hospital to give birth to her second child who was not expected to live more than a few hours. I didn't know what to say or do but I knew I had no option but to respond when the request came for me to visit her. The baby was already dead by the time I arrived. I couldn't begin to imagine the pain or trauma the mother was suffering but I listened and smiled as, still holding her dead baby in her arms, she recalled the bitter sweet hours of her little girl's birth and death. Two years later a second daughter was born to her with the same congenital heart condition. Despite the need to be very carefully monitored (she regularly suffered bouts of cyanosis when she was asleep) her mother trusted me sufficiently to leave her baby in my care. Words were not needed. I knew only too well the responsibility with which I had been entrusted.

Another child was only four when he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. After a long period of aggressive chemotherapy he was well enough to receive visitors and I took the gifts and cards the nursery children had made for him. I sat beside his little bed as his mother held him gently in her arms and read to him. He and Zak had started nursery together. I didn't know what to say when she begged me to tell her he wasn't going to die. Instead we prayed and cried together – one mother to another. He was buried on his eighth birthday and I couldn't bring myself to attend his funeral. I felt so guilty. But I was in turmoil, how could I have faced her when I knew my tears would selfishly have been for the relief and continued life of my own son and not for the loss of hers? I still think of them both. I am still haunted by guilt

and shame but I couldn't bear to tempt fate as I knew it could have been me and in my heart I thought *there but for the grace of God go I*.

When Zak started primary school he was happy and contented, confident and able. He was proud to be able to write the three letters of his name. His reception teacher didn't agree, she didn't understand him at all and seemed unable to tune into his need to be physically active. I was frequently told Zak didn't know how to 'sit still' and gradually my fun loving confident son became nervous and introverted. It took me the entire six week summer holiday to persuade him to write his name again. But he was petrified that he would *get it wrong*. As the new term approached I sensed his anxiety. His new class teacher was lively, happy and understood how to get the best out of him. Eventually Zak's confidence gradually returned. It wasn't that she changed the curriculum or that he was treated any differently to any other child but she treated *all* the children with respect, dignity and most importantly to me - with love. She hugged him if he was upset or confused and reminded him of the rules if he had forgotten them – she provided a balance of high expectation within loving boundaries

The following year at parents' evening, I sat in the crowded assembly hall in front of the two teachers who job shared their role as teacher to Zak's class. It was like going back in time as I heard the words 'he can't sit still and 'he finds it impossible to concentrate'. They never actually said the word dyspraxia but they seemed surprised when I questioned why they were so negative about my son and even more surprised when I got upset. To acknowledge that both my boys had dyspraxia was too much for me to accept. The words of the consultant came flooding back into my mind. Zak

had always been more dextrous than Josh so I questioned the diagnosis. We were told Josh would never ride a bike or learn to swim but he eventually mastered both skills and is also an accomplished bass guitarist. Zak has recently started grammar school, joined the football team and taken up drumming lessons, all of which require skill, concentration and dexterity!

I have been incredibly lucky to have a family of my own but, in many ways, I have been even more privileged to have been trusted with the care and education of so many other children in my professional career. There are numerous experiences that I could draw upon, not least, the time I spent as a nanny and the untimely death of one of my employers - Keith was only forty nine when I sat beside his bed, with his wife as he passed away. At just eighteen, that was a new and painful experience for me. Perhaps though, the one that is the least heart rending but the most poignant, was the mother who every month, when I presented her with her invoice for nursery fees, simply tore a blank cheque from her cheque book, signed it and handed it to me. The first time it happened I queried it, she looked at me puzzled and said 'If I trust you with my son who is the most precious thing in my life, then surely I can trust you to fill in a cheque on my behalf!'

To love and be loved by a child that is unrelated to me has been a gift I have treasured almost as much as being loved by my own children. It is not the same, it is different. It is exciting, fascinating, complex, and challenging but I consider it to be love all the same. It is a deep, enduring life changing, thought provoking love. Zak decided to nominate another of his class teachers for 'best teacher award'. He had made such a difference to my son's life as he neared the end of primary school and I

firmly believe the teacher did it with love. Perhaps it was because I had been able to give him the 'permission' to love my son in the same way that other mothers had given me permission to love their children.

*'Hello little one I am your Bubba'* I whispered to five day old baby Charlie.

Matthew his older brother by four years had never quite been able to master the word Grandma. I rather liked his affectionate term for me. My life is my boys and my boys are my life. I am a mother; a working mother like many other mothers. This part of my life story is neither special nor unique, except to me and the people who share it. But for me, unconditional, reciprocal love is central to my role as a mother *and* as a professional. My father taught me well.

### **Summary**

In this Chapter, I have presented my story as a working mother in order to position the research for this thesis. In Chapter Three I review the literature in relation to the focus of this study in three key areas: *Historical overview of women in the workforce in England; Attachment Theory; and the Policy Perspective in England since 1989.*

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **A Review of the Literature**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This Chapter reviews the literature in relation to the focus of the study, which investigates the choices, beliefs and dilemmas faced by six mothers in England about whether to return to paid employment when their babies were under twelve months of age. This section (3.1) introduces the remaining sections of the Chapter as follows:

**3.2:** *An Historical Overview of Women in the Workforce in England covering three main areas:*

**3.2i)** *Women, Work and Mothering*

**3.2ii)** *Current Childcare Choices in England*

**3.2iii)** *The Beliefs and Dilemmas faced by Mothers in the Decision-making Process about Returning to Work*

**3.3:** *Attachment Theory and 'Love' covers seven topics:*

**3.3i)** *Attachments are Key is about the place of Attachment Theory and Love*

**3.3ii)** *Love and Neuroscience discusses the importance of love and brain development.*

**3.3iii)** *Providing for Quality in the Education and Care divide considers definitions of quality and the importance of loving interactions between practitioners and children.*

**3.3iv)** *The Love Triangle discusses the triangular relationship between the child, the mother and the practitioner*

**3.3v)** *Theorising 'Care' and 'Love' in Early Childhood Education discusses the notion of love in relationships between babies and their key practitioners and introduces Noddings' (1984) feminist moral theory of love and care*

**3.3vi)** *Love and Policy: Teetering on the Edge introduces the notion of the place of love within the current early childhood agenda in relation to children's emotional well-being*



*3.3vii) Love and Kissing discusses the practice of childcare practitioners kissing the babies and children for whom they form close bonds, in their role as key person*

Section 3.4: *The Policy Perspective* discusses government policy in England since 1989 and the particular influence it places on mothers in their decision-making process, against the backdrop of government initiatives and rhetoric in the move to encourage mothers back to work, following the birth of their baby. This section covers two topics:

*3.4i) The Policy Perspectives on Childcare in England since 1989*

*3.4ii) The Policy Context and the Early Years Workforce*

The Chapter ends with a summary of the sections contained in this Chapter and concludes with an introduction to Chapter Four on methods and methodology.

## **3.2: An Historical Overview of Women in the Workforce**

### **3.2i: *Women, Work and Mothering***

Motherhood is changing from what was previously felt to be a private and personal responsibility to a more public and political responsibility, and the responsibilities of motherhood are becoming more complex.

(Cole, 2004, p.46)

Cole demonstrates the complexities with which women can be faced in their search to reach solutions about returning to work or not following the birth of their child/ren. *'Working women 'damaging children'* (Press Association, 2009) was the headline used by the media to report on a recent study carried out by the children's society (Layard and Dunn, 2009). According to the Press Association, the findings of the report highlight the dramatic change and decline in childhood in recent years due to what they describe as 'women's increasing economic independence' which they claim is contributing to 'family break up' and 'damaging children' The article places the role of women at the heart of the problem in relation to a step-change in the number of women who return to work when their babies are under a year old compared to the previous hundred years. The press article also reports on the largest ever independent study in the UK on childhood, which shows the rise in the number of children being cared for in single-parent households. However, as Layard and Dunn (2009) confirm, although aspects of mothers, work and childcare are discussed, the conclusions of the inquiry sit within a wider context in relation to the overall importance of providing children with opportunities to feel loved, respected and valued. The findings of the inquiry suggest that children learn values from the adults with whom they spend their time, and wherever possible children should learn about morals from their parents. Layard and Dunn (2009) advocate that for parents of young children 'the choice of staying at home should become more easily available'

(p.30). They also say ‘...for parents who are both at work, there is an urgent need for higher quality childcare’ (p.31). This contrasts with the constant media aim to discourage a mother’s right to decide whether or not to return to work when her baby is young. The extent to which such media stories help mothers who may already be experiencing feelings of doubt, anxiety and concern about their choices of work and childcare could be questioned (Pungello and Kutrz-costes, 1999).

It is the combination of women who are mothers and their childcare choices when working that bring together the three facets of the personal, the public and the political discussion that in my experience is always sure to generate a public debate. As Leach (2009) points out, ‘there is more written but less understood about childcare than about almost any other single topic that is relevant to almost anyone’ (p.viii). Cole (2004) argues that women have never been taken seriously in their efforts to work unless their role has somehow been linked to what society considers is one that is ‘suited’ to women such as nursing, teaching or at least somehow related to the caring industry. She further suggests that from the moment a woman becomes a mother there are certain expectations placed upon her. The place of motherhood and the impact it has on society and communities presents some women with incredible challenges. In some cultures, Cole suggests (2004, p.53), becoming a mother is the only way in which women gain any form of status.

Volling and Belsky (1993) reported on their study of 164 white women, their husbands and their first born babies in central Pennsylvania. The purpose of the research was to investigate maternal employment decisions after the birth of a first child. Particular attention was paid to financial factors, the relationship between the

parents of the child and the characteristics and behaviour of the child. The majority of women suggested financial circumstances had the greatest influence on their decision to return to work. In the incidence of mothers with a higher level of education, personal enjoyment and career development was also emphasised whereas this was not the case for women with lower educational attainment. Hock *et al.* (1984) published similar findings in their study of women's attitude to work following the birth of their first child. A variety of childcare arrangements were used by the families in the Volling and Belsky (1993) study who recommended flexible parental leave and high quality early education and childcare. As the authors note, despite the fact that at the time of the study parental leave, high quality childcare and financial support were very limited, the study raised important considerations about women's interest and preference to work and the impact on women to justify such decisions as opposed to just the need to contribute to the finances of the household. As an earlier study (Hock *et al.* 1984) previously identified, many women had grown up with the expectation that to stay at home and mother their children was the norm. Volling and Belsky (1993) did not investigate women's decision making processes but concluded that decisions made by mothers following the birth of a baby are rarely confined to one reason alone:

Employment decisions after the transition to parenthood are determined by multiple factors, including socioeconomic, interpersonal and contextual characteristics. Furthermore women have different reasons for returning to work in the infant's first year and the importance placed on these different factors varies considerably.

(Volling and Belsky, 1993, p.10)

Many of the findings of the above two US studies accord with the outcomes of a major study carried out in the mid-1980s in Britain (Brannen and Moss 1991). It was based on two hundred and fifty households with married couples where the mother

returned to work full time following the birth of the first child. Brannen and Moss (1991) confirmed that the landscape with regard to employment for men was much the same in 1986 as it was in 1948, for example whereby traditional roles of men going out to work and retaining a job for life was the norm and the availability of part time work for women was also high. They further report that the effect on women of their decision to continue working in a full time capacity was met with criticism and disdain by the government of the day which did little to support women financially. At that time, maternity leave did not entitle mothers to return to their original job role only to one of a similar pay scale. Additionally, group day-care at the time was largely used by social service departments to offer respite to children whose families lacked parenting skills and who required intervention as opposed to early education and childcare for mothers who were at work (Moss 1990). For many of the women in the Brannen and Moss (1991) study, childcare provision was a combination of less than satisfactory 'juggling'. Women combined several options which included costly arrangements with private providers (such as workplace nurseries) and informal arrangements with friends and their extended family. On many occasions, despite the sample group being made up of all women who were married with both partners earning, it was ultimately the mothers who took responsibility for the decision for their return to work.

Most husbands were said to sit on the fence' or to have left the decision to their wives- attitudes with which women were not necessarily happy. Relatives, friends and professionals were either regarded as hostile to the decision or had very little help to offer, either in terms of information or experience. For many women it was a lonely experience requiring considerable courage.

(Brannen and Moss, 1991, p.46)

The report confirms the norm at the time of the study whereby it was the mothers who would be expected, in the main, to take time off from their job if their child was ill. This, in turn, increased the dilemmas for the women (Brannen and Moss,1991) but, as previously noted, could be true for women in relation to their ability to be taken seriously both in relation to their job role and career progression (Cole 2004). Vincent and Ball (2006) suggest the long-hours culture is more aligned to the male work model and therefore childcare and flexible working had not been a consideration until fairly recently.

Uttal (1996) carried out a study with 31 employed mothers, to determine their views about others taking care of their children in the childcare context. She carried out in-depth interviews with the women and identified three main interpretations of childcare: custodial, surrogate, and co-ordinated. 'Custodial care' was the definition formed by nine of the mothers based on their view that although they went to work, they saw themselves as their child's main carer and it was they that set the boundaries of how their child spent their time with the childcarer. In the second definition three of the mothers saw themselves as the primary carer but recognised the emotional and physical input from the childcarer, similar to their role as mother and thereby defined this as 'surrogate care'. 'Coordinated care' was the definition of the remaining nineteen women who recognised the role of the childcarer as important and complimentary to their role as mother; but in contrast to the view of surrogate care did not consider their mother role as being replaced by the childcarer.

Uttal (1996) makes the point:

In all cases, child care is not just a service needed to sustain employment, but it has broader implications for the meaning of their motherhood status. Even when they do not recognize child care providers as carrying out child rearing, as is the case with the custodial care view, this interpretation of child care is more far reaching than simply a location to leave their children in their absence.

(Uttal, 1996, p.309)

Crosby and Hawkes (2007) compared mothers' patterns of work reported in the initial findings of early datasets from cross national research, Some interesting differences emerged from the two data sets of the *UK Millennium cohort study (MCS)* based on 18,552 families; 18,818 children in the UK and the *USA Early Childhood Longitudinal Study - Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)* was based on 10,688 children in 9859 families. The samples in both studies were nationally representative.

According to Crosby and Hawkes (2007), the findings revealed that when mothers had been employed in the twelve months prior to the birth of their baby they were more likely to return to work within the first nine months of giving birth. Taking into consideration the variables related to the differences in paid maternity leave the results found:

...striking cross-national differences in the timing of new mothers' employment. Within 3 months of giving birth, more than 40% of US mothers are in the labour force; whereas this occurs for only 13% of UK mothers, who are much more likely to (re)enter employment between 4 and 9 months post-birth. By infants' 9th month, we find that US mothers are slightly more likely to be in the labour market (59% vs. 49% in the UK), and their employment is much more likely to be full-time (62% vs. 23% in the UK).

(Crosby and Hawkes, 2007, p.391)

Studies in the UK, (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Edwards *et al.* 2002; Duncan, 2003; 2005;) suggest that social class determines the way in which women combine work and childrearing and how they view themselves as mothers. In such studies the sample group was deliberately chosen to compare and contrast the variables of social

class which is not the sole intention of this study. As Duncan (2005) confirms, the outcomes of his research in relation to social identity is highly complex:

But these are not simple structural divisions between working class and middle class, but instead refer to more nuanced social identities. These class based differences in mothering present different mixes of choice and constraint, or of 'rationality' and 'preference' in choosing alternative courses of action.

(Duncan, 2005, p.73)

For some women motherhood defines 'who they are' particularly when they have no intention to return to work (Hock, *et al.* 1984; Brannen and Moss, 1991; Volling and Belsky, 1993; Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Edwards *et al.* 2002; Duncan, 2003; 2005). But for other women motherhood is an important part of their identity but is not necessarily *the* most important. As Quinn (2004) suggests:

Motherhood is a confusion of conflicting discourses about what women should want and do, particularly in balancing childcare and work...the choices of the mother are subject to particularly intense self-regulation and every choice to work or play with a child is immensely value laden ( p.368).

Quinn (2004) suggests that universal definitions of motherhood are nonexistent, replaced instead with a variety of positions and contexts within which mothers are placed. Therefore, perhaps as Duncan (2005) notes, social class in relation to privilege or disadvantage may have some bearing on the notion of motherhood as perceived by women within these groups in society. Vincent and Ball (2006) report on issues of identity in the findings of their large study carried out with white middle class families in London. One of the main aims of their research was not only to consider the childcare choices of white middle class parents but also to specifically examine wider issues such as 'families, social class, gender, education markets and education and social policy' (p.1).



### ***3.2ii: Current Childcare Choices in England***

Government rhetoric has been relentless in its message about getting women back into the workforce (HMT, 2004; Vincent and Ball, 2001; Vincent and Ball, 2006; Leach 2009). But as Pugh (2006) asks, do parents feel torn by the mixed messages from the current government? On the one hand, there is a suggestion that parenting is the most important role, the quality of which is essential to their children's future, while, on the other hand the only way out of poverty is to be supported by systems and mechanisms that encourage adults back into work and for their children to spend time in childcare (HMT, 2004). But as previously indicated, balancing work and family life can be a challenge - particularly when children are very young. For some mothers the feeling of concern and guilt is all too consuming (Shuster, 1993; Leach, 1997; Sikes, 1997; Shearn and Todd, 2000). If mothers want to breast feed, for example, then the return to work may seem even more problematic and the feelings of guilt intensified (Earland, *et al.*1997). After the birth of a baby, parents, (mothers for the purposes of this study) in England in the 21st century, face a raft of decisions regarding the labour market. In order to reach a decision about their childcare arrangements, mothers need to know first and foremost what childcare options are available to them. Before they can make an informed decision government policy suggests that the following factors need to be considered: *choice; availability; affordability; accessibility; quality* (DfEE, 1998)

In 1998 when the Labour Government launched the *National Childcare Strategy*, one of the main aims was to ensure: 'Good quality, affordable childcare for children aged nought to fourteen in every neighbourhood' (DfEE, 1998 p.5). In 2004 in the document, *'Choice for parents, the best start for children; a ten year childcare*

*strategy*' (HMT, 2004) the government re-iterated its commitment to parents, particularly in relation to balancing work and family lives. The drive to encourage mothers back to work was explicit with clear messages to parents, particularly those in areas of deprivation that the only way out of poverty was to return to work; the long term objective being better outcomes for children (Leach, 2009). In their creation of further opportunities for families, particularly women, the government's childcare strategy and subsequent initiatives were seen by some to have increased pressure on some women to return to work (Duncan, *et al.* 2004). Although, the more recent debate has been around the quality of provision (Rahilly and Johnston, 2002; Duncan, *et al.* 2004) I suggest such debates seek to complicate and shroud the increased pressure women are under to return to the workforce (Bennett, 2003).

In terms of affordability, government funded nursery places have done little to improve the affordability of childcare for parents. The two and a half hours of 'education' per day they offer is insufficient to meet the needs of working mothers. Funded places have not proved satisfactory for nursery providers either with some either withdrawing from the scheme altogether or increasing the cost of places for children under three (Gaunt, 2006) with the effect of ultimately removing parental choice due to high costs. According to Rake (2001), the introduction of the Working Tax credit system has been limiting, providing some parents with financial support for formal childcare services, but nothing for parents who preferred informal or complementary childcare given by family or friends (Kazimirski, *et al.* 2008). Penn (2006) suggests that initiatives such as Sure Start programmes, aimed at improving outcomes for children from impoverished families were social experiments with vague policy aims. The evaluations at local level are a mixture of good and bad with she adds, 'some horror stories' (p.11). She concludes, 'The UK government has tried

to address the admittedly difficult issue of children under three and work-life balance, but it has done it in a confused and contradictory way.....' (p.11). Bagley, *et al.* (2004) reported an evaluation of one local programme 'Mazebrook'. Their findings suggested that although the intention to ensure government targets were met was clear, they were creatively adapted within the vision and values of the local programme and the professional discourse of the team. Possibly, creative licence indicates one of the defining factors of the success of the programme:

In this sense, the programme manager claimed the team while fully aware of the need to meet nationally imposed performance targets would seek to modify, wherever possible, their working practices and strategies in order to make the targets 'meaningful' to themselves and their community, and thus consistent with bottom-up values mediated via parental voice.

(Bagley, *et al.* 2004 p. 599)

### ***3.2iii: Beliefs and Dilemmas***

Rahilly and Johnston (2002) claim that mothers viewed relationships with childcare staff and their child's happiness and security as the key factors in determining quality in formal childcare. This is an interesting but not unusual perspective, as Moss (1999) argues, childcare policy proposals do not seek to ask the correct questions about children, for example, what is right for the child? What is the view of the child? Is it merely about ensuring a child's readiness for school? This is a view supported by Penn (2006):

... given the revolution that has taken place, with more young children than ever before in nursery care, why are we not thinking afresh about what they might need or want or enjoy? Do we really believe they are people?

(Penn, 2006, p.11)

Pope Edwards (2002) suggests that in history, although approaches may be very different, shared idealism can be identified for example in the pedagogies of Montessori, Waldorf and Reggio Emilia – of which quality is at the centre of their philosophy:

All three approaches represent an explicit idealism.....They are built on coherent visions of how to improve human society by helping children realise their full potential as intelligent, creative, whole persons.

(Pope Edwards, 2002, p.2)

The influences of the three approaches in Pope Edwards' study were in relation to parent participation essentially that 'Partnering with parents is highly valued ..... and children are evaluated by means other than traditional tests and grades' (Pope Edwards, 2002 p. 1). Montessori considered birth to three as the time of the child's 'unconscious absorbent mind' (Montessori and Chattin-McNichols, 1995) and Loris Malaguzzi argued that children are social from birth and that relationships in education are key to a child's learning, these included relationships with teachers, peers, family, the community and the environment (Malaguzzi, 1993). Jalongo, *et al.* (2004) suggest when parents are making decisions about returning to work the quality of the provision and the quality of the experience remains the most fundamental element as to whether parents feel able to leave their children in caring/educative environments/relationships. But what is quality? What does it look like? Does it look the same for adults (teachers, pedagogues, policy makers, parents) as it does for children fundamentally those under three, especially babies? The largest longitudinal study researching quality in the UK has been the *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project* (Sylva, *et al.* 2004) commissioned by the *Department for Education and Skills* (DfES) but despite the

instruments used to elicit the desired information, is it not merely a snapshot in time? Can such instruments really get to the subtlety of factors of quality particularly in respect of relationships? Robinson (2003) suggests that ‘Babies (and *young children*) are at the threshold of their experience – what we do to them counts’ (p.47).

Brooks-Gunn, *et al.* (2002) cite a number of US studies to investigate the impact of childcare on infants and children’s cognitive development in relation to maternal employment. The authors identify the limitations of studies which did not seek to include quality as part of the equation:

An important limitation of these studies is that none have been able to control for the quality of the child-care settings in which the children of the working mothers are placed

(p,1052-1053)

Brooks-Gunn, *et al.* (2002) suggested that the studies cited in their paper could not vouch for the quality of the settings thereby recognising the variables of quality indicators and to some extent disputing the reported outcomes. Social trends have changed over the past thirty to forty years both in England and in the international community. The most prominent change has been regarding the role of women in the workforce (Melhuish and Petrogiannis, 2006).

According to Barnes, *et al.* (2006) parents’ choice of childcare has been largely based on what has been experienced, it is linked to hindsight. Pungello and Kurtz-Costes (1999) suggest when choices are being made and decisions reached, mothers may have an ‘ideal’ or preference they are working to in relation to their choice of childcare arrangement. This ideal, they propose, may change in line with what

eventual childcare is actually experienced. However, they report the most common reasons given for choosing care arrangements are that the 'care provider is warm and loving, personable and experienced, reliable and trustworthy, and known previously' Pungello and Kurtz-Costes (1999, p.69). This view was earlier reported by Atkinson, (1994) and Cryer and Burchinal (1997) who found interactions between carer and the child to be of most importance to the mothers in their research. In a later report Pungello and Kutz-Costes, (2000) note:

As one mother who participated in this study stated, "It's so easy to say stuff before you have the baby, but it all changes when you actually have the baby in your arms." Thus, a mother may have held a particular belief before her infant was born, changed her belief when her child was born, and then made her child care decisions.

(Pungello and Kutz-Costes, 2000, p.253)

New initiatives, alongside media propaganda, can plunge new mothers into a rollercoaster of emotions as they wade through a plethora of literature to try to reach a balanced decision firstly about returning to work and secondly about choosing childcare (Abrams, 2003; Farndale, 2006; Fenton, 2006; Defries, 2008). Headlines suggesting that babies will be subjected to formal education virtually from the minute they enter nursery at a few weeks old (Womack and Lightfoot, 2005; Griffiths, 2006) do not help.

*'Doubts over 'supermums' (Defries, 2008, p 6) 'Support for working mum falls'* (BBC news 2008) were both headlines that reported on a study by Scott *et al.* (2008) supporting gender equality and a bid to policymakers to provide more realistic childcare options. However, headlines that report 'mounting concern' (University of Cambridge, 2008) about women's role in the workforce at the expense of family life

of family life do little to instil confidence in women who are trying to make informed decisions regarding their return to work or not. While it might be possible to disregard media coverage as 'hype' that sells newspapers, and to an extent dismiss research such as that by Scott, *et al.* (2008) because they are based on social attitudes (Pungello and Kurtz-Costes, 1999) it can be difficult for mothers to ignore such studies when they continue to report such negative outcomes.

The UK *Family, Children and Childcare* (FCCC) longitudinal study (Sylva, *et al.*, 2006) was set up to investigate the effects of childcare on children's development at various stages between birth and entry to school. It was based on 1200 children and families recruited from Oxford and London between 1998 and 2001. Initial publications (Barnes, *et al.*, 2006) report on the satisfaction of childcare arrangements according to interviews held with the FCCC mothers when their babies were 3 and 10 months old. The outcomes suggest higher levels of satisfaction where children were cared for by either the father or the grandparent or where the mother had a wider understanding and meaning to women's employment. Less satisfaction was reported by those using nurseries and where there were concerns about the negative effect of maternal employment. One of the most striking results was in relation to the values and beliefs held firm by the participants:

These findings suggest that when mothers are contemplating whether to work, for how many hours and using which type of child care, guidance to choosing child care could well focus not just on cost and measures designed to assess quality but also on women's own feelings and beliefs. It may be helpful to encourage such women to examine and discuss their own attitudes and beliefs. Bringing their own feelings into the open, and having them acknowledged as legitimate, may enable them to deal more effectively with the child care once it begins. These findings also highlight the importance of training caregivers to understand their professional role with parents as well as with children, and supporting them as they undertake both together.

(Barnes, *et al.* 2006, p.27)

A smaller study by Leach, *et al.* (2006) based on the findings of the original FCCC study confirmed the lack of research into mother's choices and feelings about childcare. Interviews with 57 mothers of babies aged less than 7 months old (taken from the overall FCCC sample) investigated mothers' decision making and reasons for their choice of childcare. The mothers expressed concern about their perceived loss of their role as primary carer and confirmed that they often made decisions based on whether the person was known to the family (rather than, for example, based on appropriate checks on the premises and staff). Many mothers mentioned relatives, especially grandparents, as an alternative to paid childcare. Leach, *et al.* (2006) noted the negative influence of the media especially television 'fly on the wall' type documentaries in *scaremongering*. The mothers highlighted their desire for warm, high quality interactions between the practitioner and their child. Overall, the way in which decisions were reached often bore no relation to the information gathered either before or after the baby was born. Instead they were based on very complicated reasons related to the mother's own beliefs and values, a point confirmed in the *Department Children Schools Families* (DCSF) parent surveys (Kazimirski, *et al.* 2008) where decisions were said to be 'complex' and based on the assumption that parental care is the 'most cost effective' or more 'easily available' (p.144).

'Trust in the carer' (Kazimirski, *et al.* 2008, p.14) was one of the most influential factors around mother's choice of childcare for fifty five per cent of parents who took part in the DCSF series of parent surveys on childcare in 2004 and 2007 (Bryson, *et al.*, 2006; Kazimirski, *et al.* 2008). Sixty three per cent of families with children aged nought to two years confirmed they would 'prefer to look after the



children themselves'. (p.184). The Day Care Trust (2007) reported that findings of the 2004 and 2007 surveys confirm parents' continual mistrust of formal provision and preference for parental care. Lone mothers' decisions were influenced by interplay of 'parent-centred' and 'child-centred' considerations (Day Care Trust, 2007, p 2). Leach (2009) points out that 'choosing childcare is not like choosing a refrigerator' (p.59). The specific, individual and idiosyncratic needs of the child and mother may be bound up with values and beliefs that have far more bearing on the decisions reached about their choice of childcare than cost or availability of childcare places. As Lewis (2003) asserts 'The complex pattern of finance and provision presents parents - usually mothers - with choices, but not always pleasant ones' (p.235).

The study by Buzzanell, *et al.* (2005) with 11 mothers in management positions reconsiders the role of the working mother. The mothers had reframed the notion of the 'good mother', one that gives up her other roles for the sake of raising her children and is solely available to her family, (Douglas and Michaels, 2004; Miller, 2005; Johnston and Swanson, 2006) into the good *working* mother, one where the role of a working mother is still considered to be a 'full time' role and not diminished just because she goes to work. This shift in thinking allowed the image to fit into their lives as a more supportive model and was arranged into three themes: 1) Good working mothers arrange quality childcare; 2) Good working mothers are (un)equal partners; and 3) Good working mothers feel pleasure in their good working mother role (p.261). By using Weick's (1992; 1995) 'sense making model' to make sense of and interpret their roles as both mother and worker, the mothers were able to justify and reframe their decision making into an acceptable notion of a mother who works.

The study sample was small and only focused on white middle class women in management roles. Nevertheless, despite the author's assertion of the model as a 'tentative and fragile identity construction' (p.279), it does, however, provide a different lens with which to construct a view of the 'good' working mother otherwise, as Johnson and Swanson (2006) point out:

Where are the full-time employed mothers who work for the sake of their career identity, require paid childcare, yet still strongly identify with their parenting role? The dismissal of this group as "reluctant mothers" or "nonconformists" only serves to perpetuate the mystique of intensive mothering and its myth of the incompatibility of employment and "good" mothering.

(Johnston and Swanson, 2006, p.511)

Miller (2005) argues that typical ideologies of motherhood differ across societies and contexts. For example, the stereotype of the white, middle class mother is often viewed as 'normal' and 'good' (*ibid*), or, as Dalli (1999; 2002) confirmed, 'good mothers want to look after their child at all times' (1999, p.92). Winnicott (1965) used the term 'good enough' to stress the individual nature of parenting, proposing that there is no blue print to determine the correct way to raise a child. So whether the parent has met the needs of the child and is assessed to be 'good enough' can only be decided in relation to each individual child. In the developing world, the need for survival may be seen to outweigh the notions of motherhood as different to those perceived in the Western world (Miller, 2005). Therefore, the concept of motherhood and the role of the 'good' mother are, Miller suggests, necessarily influenced by the context within which mothering exists.

I agree with Miller's (2005) view:

...within the Western world dominant ideologies surrounding motherhood can be seen to represent the ideas and beliefs of more powerful groups and do not recognise or accommodate the diversity of women's lived experiences

(p.p 55-56)

This section of the literature review, has discussed the changing role of women in relation to recent history and mothering. In particular I have discussed mothers' beliefs and the range of issues that surround the way mothers make decisions particularly in relation to their own values and beliefs. In the next section 3.3 I will critically review Attachment Theory and its relation to this thesis.

### **3.3: Attachment Theory and 'Love'**

#### ***3.3i: Attachments are the Key***

Bowlby's work (1953; 1969; 1973; 1980; 1982) was based on assumptions about mother/child attachments that were later challenged. He suggested that if a child played with a toy happily in the presence of the mother, and then the mother left the room to be replaced by an unfamiliar adult, the child would become distressed. If upon the mother's return, the child immediately responded with affection, then he/she was assessed as having a secure mother/child relationship. If the child ignored the mother, the mother/child relationship was deemed insecure and unstable. Of course, it is important to note the timing of the release of Bowlby's study as servicemen were returning home from the war. Jobs that had been carried out by women while the men were involved in active service were suddenly needed for the men. *Maternal care and Mental Health* was published in 1951 by the World Health Organisation (WHO) based on the findings of a paper commissioned by Ronald Hargreaves about the plight of homeless children in post - war Europe.

According to Bretherton (1992), Hargreaves had been struck by Bowlby's earlier work on children starved of affection which led him to commission the report by Bowlby which proved highly popular at the time. It was translated into fourteen languages and sales of the English paperback version peaked at 4 million copies (Bretherton, 1992, p764). Post-war pressure groups continued upon the theme of long lasting and irretrievable damage to the mother-child relationship in a bid to keep women in the home. But this rationale has since been challenged. For example, Moss and Melhuish (1991) in their Department for Health study of the issues in day care, argued against the research methods used by Bowlby and said 'When other methods (of study) are used, it turns out that the differences are not as marked' (p.58). Rutter (1972) also disputed Bowlby's theory, pointing out that the security of the mother-child relationship was dependent on the skills and abilities of the mother and that mothering skills are not necessarily innate. He argued that a baby would respond best to the people who showed the most sensitivity towards him/her. Bowlby's theory that children attach themselves to one main figure has often been debated. Rutter (1972), for example, suggested infants can form multiple attachments and concludes:

If the mothering is of high quality and is provided by figures who remain the same during the child's early life, then (at least up to four or five mother figures) multiple mothering need have no adverse affects.

(p.25)

Rutter further proposed that when the mother goes out to work, so long as the alternative multiple relationships made with the child are stable, and good childcare is provided, the child is unlikely to suffer. But as Bretherton (1992) points out the 'mother substitute' to which Bowlby refers is often neglected by critics and omitted from the discussion.

Bowlby himself argued in '*Attachment and loss*' (1969), that his earlier work had been misinterpreted and that his theory had been misunderstood.

It has sometimes been alleged that I have expressed the view that mothering should always be provided by a child's natural mother, and also that mothering 'cannot be safely distributed among several figures' (Mead, 1962). No such views have been expressed by me.

(Bowlby 1969, p.303)

Bowlby's controversial theory has been argued and debated for many years and has fuelled the ongoing controversy about day care for children. Much of the criticism stems from the fact that Bowlby studied children who had been brought up in residential institutions or had been separated for long periods from their parents due to long periods in hospital. The ethics as well as the research design, of Bowlby's study would, today be highly questionable. Critics of attachment theory claim that secure attachment is not always necessary for healthy development and may depend on cultural child rearing practices (Hennessey, *et al.* 1992). Bowlby's studies have left a legacy of guilt for many women who have taken the decision to return to work and place their child into day care despite the increasing demand for women to be employed and the implications for mothers of pre-school children. Brannen and Moss (1991) and Mullan (1987) acknowledged the controversy of Bowlby's theories of attachment but argued there is a difference between what Bowlby *actually said* and did, as opposed to *what others have said* he is supposed to have said and believed in - Mullan claims there is a difference. According to Mullan (1987) Bowlby suggested it is the enjoyment derived by both child and mother that is most important and not the amount of time spent in each other's company. In other words it is the quality of the experience, not the quantity that matters most.

More recent evidence suggests that infants are capable learners, able to form multiple attachments from birth (Gopnik, *et al.* 1999; Trevarthen, 2002). But what is clearly important is the knowledge, understanding and perhaps even more important the consistency of the adult (Elfer, *et al.* 2003; Goldschmied and Jackson, 2004). Of Bowlby's notion of grief and mourning in infancy and early childhood, Bretherton states, 'he also suggested that an inability to form deep relationships with others may result when the succession of substitutes is too frequent' (Bretherton, 1992, p.770. As Goldschmied and Jackson (2004) point out, to a young child when parted from their parent, it can seem like an interminable loss. The child is competent but as yet unable to attach meaning to the rationale of the parent leaving. The baby does not yet have any notion of time, and, similar to bereavement, is therefore not yet capable of accepting the separation. The baby has not yet developed the capacity to know that the mother will return. Bion (1962) considers the concept of 'containment' as the adult taking in the child's distress, understanding it and thereby responding to the child's emotional needs. The child then feels looked after emotionally (s/he feels *contained*) (Winnicott, 1964; 1965) with adults who are really 'in tune' with the child and will be able to 'bring on' him or her much more successfully than the adult who is not. The primary caregiver or as Elfer, *et al.* (2003) propose, the key person, is not intended to 'replace' the parent or mother but instead to understand, sustain and support the child's learning and to value and respect the relationships that the child makes, both with adults and with other children (Selleck and Griffin, 1996).

As Goldschmied and Jackson (2004) argue:

Some parents may need help to understand that sharing love and affection with another caregiver is not like sharing an apple or a sandwich where the more people the less there is for each. Love is learned by loving...by the end of their first year, most children have formed attachments to several different people. Their love for their mothers is no way diminished by this.

(p, 44)

Lamb (2007) contends that ‘a child with secure attachment is able to rely on the parent or parents as a source of comfort and safety in times of upset and stress.’ (p.2). It would be virtually impossible to dispute this notion but it is possible, I suggest, to build upon this ethos or even replace the word parent(s) with the word ‘key person(s)’, thus broadening the notion of and valuing the ‘who’. This concept is subtly brought to the fore in the term ‘primary caregiver’ as noted in the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005). With regard to early years and childcare, Belsky argues that when the caregiver, who is both sensitive and responsive to the child, sees the world through a lens that responds to the child’s needs rather than that of their own, then the child is most likely to flourish (Belsky, 2007).

### ***3.3ii: Love and Neuroscience***

Countries in the *Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development* (OECD) have now recognised that many children are growing up outside of the traditional family home and spending much of their time in childcare (Adamson, 2008). Alongside this, neuroscience (Gopnik, *et al.* 1999; Trevarthen, 2002; and Gerhardt, 2004) is providing increasing evidence of the capabilities and competences of babies from birth. This, in turn, I suggest, is strengthening the case for the importance of deeper, sustaining relationships between babies and their significant adults. The most overwhelming and exciting point, for me, in the OECD report is the use of the words ‘love’ and ‘loving’ in relation to the wider context and children’s intellectual development. Talk of ‘the role of love as a foundation for intellectual as well as emotional development’ (Adamson, 2008, p.5) is almost unprecedented. Clearly the OECD report is important in terms of the international perspective and

overall context of childcare in the twenty first century but in relation to this thesis Adamson's (2008) discussion of the importance of the 'serve and return relationships with carers' an interesting interpretation, nevertheless confirms for me the notion of loving reciprocal relationships as part of a higher intellectual debate.

*...neuroscience is beginning to confirm and explain the inner workings of what social science and common experience have long maintained – that loving, stable, secure, stimulating and rewarding relationships with family and caregivers in the earliest months and years of life are critical for almost all aspects of a child's development.*

(Adamson, 2008, p.6 [emphasis in the original])

The overwhelming message here is that children need to experience love both within the family and from whomsoever they spend the majority of their time (Layard and Dunn, 2009). Adamson (2008) confirms the continued and controversial debate of whether or not children under a year old should be cared for and educated in early years settings outside of the family context but goes on to suggest that some of these decisions can only be reached when there is real choice linked to parental leave.

Using a multi - method approach, Lee (2006) studied babies' relationships and attachments to their significant adult outside the family, finding that it took babies between six and eleven weeks to form relationships with their significant adults. Observations, video recordings, interviews and documentation confirmed the importance of reciprocity as a crucial factor in the relationship building process. In other words, it was highly significant that the relationship was mutually meaningful to both the child and the adult as co-constructors in the relationship, each seeking out the other.



As Parker-Rees (2008) asserts:

...because infants enjoy the companionship and familiarity associated with seeing their own behaviour returned to them with interest, they reward attentive adults with smiles, laughter and infectious joy, shaping the adults' behaviour even as their own behaviour is shaped by the adults' editing. (p.9)

### ***3.3iii: Providing for Quality in the Education and Care Divide***

In the 2003 review of the policies of the twenty countries of the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD), Bennett (2003) concluded the divide between care and education was still deeply evident. In the late 1980's there was need for most of the OECD countries to consider the employment market in relation to the further participation of women and for governments to restore their attention and investment in early childhood services. In 1998 twelve countries – Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States of America took part in a review of their childhood services. The review considered a range of objectives in relation to early childhood policy across the countries. It examined programmes and provision in a broad, holistic sense from birth to compulsory school age. Influences on children's learning were considered in relation to families, communities and environmental factors. But as Bennett (2003) noted: 'In particular the review investigated concerns about *quality, access and equity...*' (p, 23).

First and second round reviews were carried out in the years 1998 and 2000. In 2001 a further seven countries: Canada, France, Hungary, Ireland, Korea, Mexico and Spain joined. Bennett (2003) suggests that there is much less emphasis and importance attached to the needs of children under three than for the same service for

children aged over three, therefore the dichotomy of quality and return to the labour force for women is not universally challenged. He reports that the Nordic countries have had by far the most success in providing equitable and somewhat higher quality services for under - threes thereby perhaps offering parents a real choice. However, he concludes that insufficient research has been carried out that takes into account the best interests of everyone; the economy, young children and women. More recently, since the advent of guidance documents (DfES, 2002; DCSF, 2008a), services in England have been expanded to include more availability and choice for parents of children under three.

The emphasis is shifting with regard to women's place in the workforce and expansion of services is insufficient to meet demand. Due to the ongoing reporting of international research into early childhood education and care programmes (Bennett; 2003; Hank and Kreyenfeld, 2000; Bertram and Pascal, 2002; Woodhead, 1996; 2006, OECD, 2001; 2006) the issue of quality is always at the centrality of discussion although finding a common definition remains elusive as 'It is difficult to assess quality of childcare provision as observers, governmental agencies and childcare providers cannot agree on common standards or definitions of 'quality' (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2006, p.8). Quality is important, particularly in relation to the emotional needs of children in their very early years, (Shore, 1997; Carroll, 2001; Elfer, *et al.* 2003) as is the prominence placed upon the need to 'join up' the education and care agenda under one government department. Some Countries have been more successful in doing so – Denmark, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden and more recently the UK – particularly in relation to the Every Child Matters agenda (2003).

But in reality the desire/need to return to work balanced alongside raising their children is an intensely personal decision for women.

The international community is largely united about the rights of *all* children to a quality early education. But as Peralta (2008) offers 'Social and Cultural relevance is an essential factor of the quality of educational programmes and, together with agent participation, must form an intrinsic part of their definition' ( p.5). She further suggests that in countries such as Japan, which is particularly densely populated, the authorities intentionally place children in larger groups to assist them in adapting into large groups. Although there are indicative styles and criteria that can be applied to similar settings across the international agenda alongside models of good practice, perhaps a case in point is Reggio Emilia. The ethos and approach is a way of life not just for the children but for a whole community that has reached a shared understanding of their particular philosophy and approach to learning (Abbot and Nutbrown, 2001). Practitioners from around the world who visit the Reggio Emilia settings, are inspired by the quality of the educational programme (Katz, 1999), but they cannot replicate practice in their own countries without first reflecting on their fundamental philosophy and aims. As New (1999) advocates, to appreciate, adopt and adapt the ideas and philosophies within the context and communities that early years settings exist is perhaps a more respectful, meaningful, reflective and culturally appropriate way to carry out and build upon what Loris Malaguzzi (1993) would call *the hundred languages of children*.

The views, opinions and values of children, their families and communities must be taken into account (Peralta, 2008, p.10)

However, where the theme of quality has been considered as the focus for research in early childhood education, instruments have been developed to measure aspects of quality capable for use across a range of settings to ascertain common indicators. For example *the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project* study is well known for the use of environmental indicators in the form of *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales – ECERS* (Harms and Clifford, 1980; Sylva, *et al.* 2003) and *The Infant Toddler Environment rating Scales – ITERS* (Harms, *et al.* 1990; Harms, *et al.* 2003)

Other indicators of quality such as the Leuven involvement scales developed in 1976 by Laevers (1997) suggest an ‘experiential approach’ as the central theme. There is no doubt that the work of Laevers (2005) and his team, built upon thirty years of detailed research, has produced an effective tool but rather like the ECERS instruments, the ‘well-being’ and ‘involvement’ indicators on their own are limiting and I question the validity of transferring a set of tools developed for use with older children and transposing them for use with babies and why instead such tools are never developed first with the youngest children in mind. Furthermore why does it continue to be acceptable to dilute the importance of quality for babies and young children? I suggest that we are missing the most obvious of indicators – the quality of the interaction between the practitioner (key person) and the child. Methods of observation such as those developed by the Tavistock Clinic are based on psychoanalytical studies (Elfer, 2006). The intention is based on the observer necessarily being required to ‘make some interpretations about internal emotional states rather than having to rely only on the data arising from visible external behaviours’ (Elfer, 2006, p.83). This style of observation I suggest, seems to offer a

greater insight into the emotional responses of young children as a determinate of their interaction and attachment experiences and is perhaps a better indicator of the quality of the experience for the child.

International research continues to be divided with regard to the benefits or harm effects of early years and childcare upon young children primarily those under twelve months of age (Melhuish and Petrogiannis, 2006). Some studies suggest factors unrelated to the actual childcare provision such as the mother/child bond, family income, mother's occupation and the environment at home are more crucial in determining better child outcomes (*ibid*). However, Melhuish and Petrogiannis, (2006) found the common denominator from research across a range of international contexts, for example; China, Greece, India, Israel Italy, New Zealand, Sweden and the USA is the vital importance of 'Adult-child interaction that is responsive, affectionate and readily available' (p.175) which fits with earlier studies that reported what mothers would choose for their children (Atkinson, 1994; Pungello and Kurtz-Costes, 1999; Cryer and Burchinal, 1997)

Government policies and research is not always helpful with regard to parents' role and working mothers, as one frequently contradicts the view of the other.

The nature and availability of maternity and parental leaves are closely linked to policy and provision for children under three, and reflect social views about young children and their education and care. It is a complex field, and politicians, economists and planners in industrial societies need to decide how to fund such leaves, while ensuring both economic returns *and* the best interests of young children and women.

(Bennett, 2003, pp 43-44)

Adamson (2008) confirms the divide between education and care as unacceptable and this message, though not new, is important. Although there has been recognition

that the unnatural divide between care and education is prevalent across the early years sector (HMT, 2009) English policy has, since the 1990s, been clear such a divide is unhelpful (DES, 1990; DfES, 2004; DfES, 2006; DCSF, 2008a).

Discussing legislative changes and shifts in policy, Lewis (2003) suggested that:

The old distinction between nursery education and childcare has been formally extinguished only in the new administrative arrangements. The position in respect of funding and provision is much more blurred, and crucially, in respect of staffing, remains very divided (p 23).

Some practitioners who have chosen not to train as a teacher in the traditional sense have long believed their role as ‘carer’ to be or be seen as less important (Lally, *et al.*, 1997; DfES, 2001a; Ofsted, 2001, Ireland, 2004). However, Manning- Morton (2006) suggests ‘practitioners’ who are ‘not proper teachers and not really social workers’ (p. 50) are in a unique position to be able to straddle the various disciplines to offer insights and perspectives in ways which do not necessarily require them to be ‘experts’. For Mortimer (1990) the role of carer is not ‘inadequate’ or ‘inferior’ to that of the teacher/educator but rather has a clear validity and uniqueness:

These Nursery Nurses value the close relationship which they gain from working with single, or small groups of children. They learn much more about certain children than they could were they to be overseeing a whole class. This fits with an essential part of their training which educates them to try to get to know children as much as possible in order to do their best for children. Thus they value close contact with a few children, preferring this to the idea of being more thinly spread over a large group.

(Mortimer, 1990, p.11)

Even a decade ago, the notion of close, respectful attachment with young children was being fostered as an important part of babies’ and young children’s development. Mortimer’s insightful perspective and definition of the caring

practitioner is in keeping with current thinking and the role of the key person as defined by Elfer, *et al.* 2003)

...how one or two adults in the nursery, while never taking over from the parents, connect with what parents would ordinarily do: being special for the children, helping them manage throughout the day, thinking about them, getting to know them too...(Elfer, *et al.*2003, p.vi)

Gillespie Edwards (2002) suggests that attachment brings behaviour from young children that requires acceptance and positivity on the part of the adult with whom the child becomes attached. When this is done well the young child receives a clear message that he/she is loved and looked after. But this is challenging work and sometimes the child is secure in his or her attachments to their key adults but at other times may cry or protest if s/he loses sight of their special person and needs to stay close to them, reassured that s/he is still loved and cherished – attached. ‘An attachment relationship is one of intimacy, involving all the senses’ (Gillespie Edwards, 2002, p.22). Robinson (2003) refers to the first twelve months in a young child’s life as being the ‘*year of opportunity*’. However, the *opportunity* to support and bring on the child can sometimes be lost when practitioners spend much of their day involved in routine tasks. Robinson (2003) suggests such attention to organisation is ‘perpetuation of the sad myth that anyone (especially female) can look after babies’ (p.10). This can be reflected in practice, when it is often the least skilled practitioners that are assigned to care for young babies in early years settings. When what young babies require most is sensitive, skilled, loving, special adults with whom they have formed a deep and sustaining relationship. Gillespie Edwards (2002) argues that practitioners should not be concerned that very young children will confuse their special adult in the nursery with their parent. She urges

practitioners to consider instead the likelihood of suffering for young children who do not have the opportunity to form close attachments with adults when they are cared for in a nursery:

Some practitioners may be anxious about assuming a parental role or even of taking some of the love properly due to the parent. It is safe to say that even very young babies will not confuse their carer with their parent and they are more likely to suffer from the lack of a close personal relationship at nursery.

(Gillespie Edwards, 2002, p.22)

### ***3.3iv: The 'Love Triangle'***

Babies and small children who are finding ways to communicate their likes and dislikes, delight and distress, are powerless to communicate in all but simplistic means (Powell, 2005). They have yet to learn the sophisticated ways that older children and adults use to articulate their desires, (Manning-Morton, 2006; Elfer, 2007).

The role of the practitioner to develop close, sustaining relationships with children and their families is well-documented (Goldschmied and Jackson, 1994, 2004; Penn, 1999; Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2001; Gillespie Edwards, 2002; Elfer, *et al.* 2003). The idea of the key person is that the same practitioner (or two practitioners working opposite shifts in a buddy like system) works with the same baby each day, feeding, changing nappies and interacting with the baby in a close, respectful and dignified manner. The role of the key person is to get to know the child well and, by careful observation of the child's likes and dislikes, plan for his or her everyday individual needs and patterns of interest. The younger the child the more important it is to maintain the care and consistency of the same adult(s) – the key person(s). The



adult in this role especially, in group care, (Elfer and Dearnley 2007) requires support from the manager or head of the centre to organise for periods of intimate care. The key person approach takes a great deal of thought and careful planning and the practitioner will need to feel emotionally supported by the hierarchy. Elfer, *et al.* (2003) assert that the 'Effective Framework for Practice' should include 'systems of mentoring and supervision'. Furthermore, that: 'No practitioner, whatever their professional experience and personal qualities, can go on being effective without effective support' (p.35). Raikes (1996) makes the point that the trust and security families place in the organisation is likely to be increased when they know their key person is supported by an experienced, well qualified superior. It is this ethos that is fundamental to the success of the key person approach which makes it unique and as Elfer, *et al.* (2003) propose 'Failure to take account of these underlying anxieties explains why some nurseries' key person approaches do not seem to translate into practice' (p33). Hochschild's (1983, 2003) concept of 'emotional labour' describes any paid role that draws upon aspects of emotion which requires the person to be unemotional – 'professional' in his/her approach. Hochschild (1983) draws upon the role of the cabin crew of an airline in which the crew were trained to keep the passengers 'happy' and to avoid showing any strain or emotion. Working with very young children can be considered a form of 'emotional labour', it is work that involves and necessarily requires emotion. Could it be perhaps that in a training programme that requires staff to be highly qualified professionals in a world class workforce (CWDC, 2008) 'emotion' is deemed unprofessional? Perhaps in a role that requires a great deal of 'emotional labour' the emotional aspect becomes trained out of the practitioner for fear it is unacceptable. Elfer and Dearnley (2007) argue for an 'emotionally containing model of attachment'. The idea not to deny the presence

of emotion or attachment on behalf of the practitioner but instead to suggest a model of support for practitioners to help them to come to terms with the emotional labour required of them in their day to day interactions with babies and young children.

Price (2001) draws a parallel in relation to the role of the teacher in the classroom noting the enjoyment and fulfilment of the role as well as the importance of being emotionally present:

The emotional task of the teacher in this tradition is to make themselves available for use by the children, in a way that has deliberate if unconscious parallels with the availability of the rather stereotypical 'good mother'.  
(p.174)

Working with parents is also an involved task, especially when practitioners are trying to strike the balance between supporting the parent's anxiety about returning to work and trying to do the best for the baby, who may be inconsolable while away from their parent, essentially their mother. As Pungello and Kutz Costes (2000) report:

Helping mothers to identify their own beliefs related to the dual roles of work and parenting may, in itself, alleviate some of the stress for many of these women. If the constraints a mother faces is at odds with her inner beliefs, practitioners may also help the mother find a compromise Practitioners should be particularly mindful that the mosaic of beliefs, attitudes, and constraints is unlikely to be identical for any two women.

(p.254)

It takes a huge amount of resolve on the part of the practitioner to work sensitively with children and parents in a manner that is respectful, equitable and professionally appropriate. Manning-Morton (2006) considers that there is a danger that for practitioners who have followed their desire to care for young children do so because perhaps their own needs were not very well met in childhood. Such practitioners, she suggests, are ill equipped to deal with the complexities of rejection and criticism

from the babies, children and, indeed, the parents with whom they work. She contends:

Most early years practitioners, along with others in the 'helping' professions, have an image of themselves as giving, caring people.... So when the child runs in with a hug or the parent is grateful, there is satisfaction. The problem with this idyllic picture is that it is not real; children also reject practitioners, and parents criticise...In light of this it seems imperative that professional early years practitioners are able to bring a maturity of self-awareness to their job. They need to be able to engage with the more difficult aspects of children's learning and development...and also to become experts in themselves, including their own darker side. They need to be able to look at their own motivations and understand where they come from and through the knowledge they gain about themselves to better understand and adjust their responses to children.

(Manning- Morton, 2006 p.48)

*Listening to Young Children* a resource to support practitioners and parents to listen to the voice of young children (Lancaster, 2003), recognises that it is difficult, at times, to know how best to listen to the voice of a young child, a baby. However when an adult is *really* tuned in to the child then it is possible to interpret the sounds, gurgles and gestures that a baby makes. Lancaster (2003, p.7) points out, 'A newborn baby is beginning to tell stories by looking into the eyes of others, posing silent questions, asking for co-operation for understanding a common world' The reciprocal exchange often observed between a mother and child can be subtly replicated when a practitioner has come to know, understand and likely love the child. Pugh and Selleck (1996) suggest that adults need to be able to participate with children; offering even the youngest babies an opportunity for their voices to be heard and expressed not just in speech but through play, actions, and feelings. Elfer, *et al.* (2003) suggest the role of the key person when it is really understood is not to replace but to supplement the loving care and learning time children need at home (p.19). Langston and Abbott (2005) suggest that caring for and educating young

children is a complex task, and that it is imperative that practitioners are given opportunities to really understand the many facets of their role. In addition I argue that it is because caring for, educating, and *loving* young children is a complex task for professionals it is not really discussed. Love is too often hidden by other words, such as: respect, dignity, containment and attachment or ‘emotional well-being’ (Laevers, 1997).

### ***3.3v: Theorising ‘Care’ and ‘Love’ in Early Childhood Education***

According to Goldstein (1998) caring in education is more than gentle smiles and warm hugs. She challenges this commonly held and simplistic view of caring, suggesting that it ‘obscures the complexity and the intellectual challenge of work with young children’ and ‘coupling early childhood education with this simplistic conception of caring will be detrimental to the field’ (Goldstein, 1998, p. 244).

Noddings’ work on the ethics of care and education (1984) offers a feminist moral theory that puts care firmly on another plane. Noddings argues that in relation to morality and ethics men and women come to it differently. Noddings believes that men conform to the traditional logical approach, while women tend to consider morality from a position of feelings and memories. All of which she proposes is based on our experiences as either men or women – hence her notion of the feminist perspective in relation to the ethics of caring. However, not all men and women would conform to this perspective. Noddings (1984) theory is undoubtedly intricate on the one hand, but sense making on the other. By this I mean, for example, she argues that when caring, the carer might take on added anxiety or burden but to care without ‘caring’ is to perform a task that means nothing and is irrelevant and inconsequential. She proposes that a carer may not need verbal communication with

the 'cared-for' to be in tune with him/her. It would seem to me that Harding, (1971) would have called this 'intuition' or, tacit knowledge as in '*women's ways of knowing*' (Belenky, *et al.*1997). In relation to young children such 'intuitive caring' might be interpreted as '*tuning in*' (Lancaster, 2003). Noddings (2003) argues that the notion and the ethics of caring relate to an approach whereby the experience of having been cared for leaves a memory which can later be used by that person in order to give care themselves. She suggests it is not the consequences of the act of caring, but what precedes the act of caring which is of most importance. Noddings rejects *love* in any universal form and dismisses spiritual love in the Christian sense, for example, there is no requirement to love. However Noddings presents several examples of how differently men and women approach morality and suggests that women can be made to feel inferior when they talk about and draw on their feelings. Noddings' work takes the discussion back to the earlier point I made in section 3.3iii of the 'inferior' carer (the Nursery Nurse) and the 'superior' educator (the qualified teacher) in the care and education divide (Lally, *et al.* 1997; DfES, 2001a; Ofsted, 2001, Ireland, 2004)

Noddings' (1984) feminist moral theory may help to explain why, when there has been a major horrific event – be it because of terrorism, tsunami, and war - (Johnson, 2005), the most humane acts of altruistic kindness imaginable amongst total strangers emerge (Barnaby, 2005). A powerful example of this followed the earthquake in China in 2008 when a young breastfeeding mother, Jiang Xiaoujuan, also a police officer, went out on the streets to save orphan babies from starvation by breastfeeding them herself (Riminton, 2008) . The image of this young woman in her uniform with a young baby clasped to her breast became headline news but Jiang

Xiaoujuan claimed in one article she was merely doing what anyone would do in a crisis even though she was reported to have been feeding up to nine babies.

Jiang has become a celebrity, followed by local media and proclaimed on a newspaper front page as "China's Mother No. 1" She's embarrassed by the fuss. "I think what I did was normal," she said. "In a quake zone, many people do things for others. This was a small thing, not worth mentioning...I feel about these kids I fed just like my own. I have a special feeling for them. They are babies in a disaster"

(Riminton, 2008,p.u)

Another article read:

...we stand with many mothers worldwide who salute Jiang Xiaojuan profoundly. It's a mystery women don't often speak of publicly, what it's like to nourish another human being... or many... from one's own blood and bones. It is one of the greatest honours in the world.

(Pinkola Estés, 2008, p. u)

Goldstein (1998) sees Noddings' perspectives having 'deeply ethical and experiential roots' (p.245), pointing out that while other feminist philosophers have explored the notion of care and concern (Held, 1987; Gilligan 1982; Swadener, 1992), it is Noddings' work on 'caring' (1984) which has proved most influential. Noddings' theory builds the view that caring is not about feelings but, as Goldstein puts it, it is 'not something you are, but rather something you engage in, something you do' (1998, p.246). Noddings talks about and describes caring as both giving and receiving and uses the term 'reciprocity' (Noddings, 1994). The role of the individual can, Noddings suggests, be linked to 'motivational displacement 'and can happen on differing levels; 'caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference and into the other's' (Noddings, 2003, p.24).

It is in relation to both *reciprocity* and *motivational displacement* that I locate my own theoretical framework for this thesis. Noddings (2003) defines motivational displacement as being concerned with another and becoming as absorbed in what is important to them as much as one might be with one's own project a moment earlier. This resonates entirely with my thinking. If I am engrossed in something, shopping for example and I become aware of a child who is persevering with a task, to say reach the supermarket shelf to access a favourite cereal, I become engrossed in her activity and 'will her' to succeed. I cannot ignore the child in this task. I am experiencing in this example both *engrossment* (an awareness of the child's action and intention) and *motivational displacement* (putting myself into the child's shoes, recognising her efforts to succeed). When she is successful in her task I (the one 'caring') acknowledge and affirm her persistence and she (as the one 'cared for') looks up and smiles in a reciprocal exchange and as Noddings contends the caring encounter is complete. If the child's adult, let's say mother, becomes aware of my presence and interest, I (as the one caring) may comment and the mother (then being the one cared for) may enter into a reciprocal exchange completing a second caring encounter. These caring encounters may be only brief but are examples of Noddings' notion of the vital importance of *reciprocity*. She suggests in order to respond as a genuine carer, one does have to empty the soul of its own contents: 'One cannot say "Aha! This fellow needs care. Now let's see – here are the seven steps I must follow." Caring is a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviours' (Noddings, 1992 p.42). Goldstein's interpretation of the ethics of care fits with my theoretical framework in this thesis:

....rooting this perspective squarely in experience, as Noddings has done, allows women and early childhood educators to own caring in a way that is strength rather than a weakness.

(Goldstein, 1998, p.247)

Drawing on the work of Noddings (1984; 1992; 2003) Gilligan, (1982) and Goldstein (1998) on the intellectual aspect of caring in relation to ethics of care and education, I want to push the boundaries further and more specifically in relation to babies and children under three. I want to suggest that for early childhood professionals it is not only the ethics of care and education but the ethics of 'love,' care and education that is bound up in this complex theory. If this is the case, then could it be that when some mothers recognise reciprocity at first hand, they are able to identify the intellectual experience as an *attachment* that is fundamentally in tune with their own wants and needs for their child, rather than a feeling that is threatening to the mother - child relationship.

In every caring encounter the mother is necessarily carer and the infant cared-for. But the infant responds – he or she coos, wriggles, stares attentively, smiles, reaches out, and cuddles. These responses are heartwarming; they make caregiving a rewarding experience.

(Noddings, 1992, p.17)

It is easy to dismiss the word *love* as a feeling, a romantic notion. In music, lyrics and literature, love and being *in-love* generally conjure up the view of romantic lovers sometimes blissful and joyful or painful and unrequited. The love of 'mankind' in terms of respect, dignity and morality is a term adopted by many who follow a specific religion or faith as in the '*Love of God*'. Noddings (2003) makes the point that ethics, 'the philosophical study of morality' (p.1) could be conceived from either the masculine *Logos* or the feminine *Eros* but she claims that neither captures the totality of her thinking



“Eros” does capture the flavour of and spirit of what I am attempting here; the notion of psychic relatedness lies at the heart of the ethic I shall propose. In another sense however, even “Eros” is masculine in its roots and fails to capture the receptive rationality of caring that is characteristic of the feminine approach

(Noddings, 2003 p. 1)

For professionals, the idea of loving children who are unrelated, if it is discussed at all, is done so with caution and perhaps even feared in relation to misguided child protection reprisals (Piper and Smith, 2003). Embedded within her theory of ethical care and education, Noddings (2001) makes a bold and somewhat controversial statement:

Most human beings, it seems, want care from people who love them, not from paid strangers. Solutions to this problem, if any can be found, will require some creative thought.

(Noddings, 2001, p.32)

Goldstein (1994) discusses Noddings’ view in relation to the role of teachers and mothers, drawing on their similarities. She refers to the feminist perspective of connection but she does however call it ‘*love*’ (p.1) If practitioners are given ‘permission’ to *love* the children that they work with there is a danger that the sector could become fraught with policies that, in effect, misguide practitioners into misinterpreting child protection procedures (Page, 2005). Peter Elfer asserts his concern for the inexperienced practitioner in relation to safeguarding children.

If they pick up a baby or put a baby on their lap somebody is going to turn round and say ‘You are not behaving professionally’ or even worse somebody to say ‘you are behaving abusively’.

(Page, 2005, p.103)

Elfer suggests that ‘almost the opposite is true for a baby, they need a lot of physical contact’ (p.103). Tricia David has also expressed concern... ‘I am fearful that we are moving too far away from cuddling children’ (*ibid*). Babies and children need love, and indeed, in the context of paid child care, I suggest we might begin to think about this as ‘*professional love*’. The caveat being that practitioners who really know, understand and are secure in their reciprocal relationships with the babies and children for whom they are responsible, do so with the rights of the child fully and wholly embedded in their practice and at the centre of every aspect of their work.

Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006) investigated the *emotional labour* of one teacher and a teacher educator in an inclusive classroom and suggested it is the sort of person the teacher was that made the difference in relation to her approach to caring. In this regard they dismissed Noddings’ and Goldstein’s interpretations of love and care suggesting instead:

There is not simply one kind of caring encompassing all actions and beliefs; there are several kinds as a result of the nature of emotional labour involved and the context in which it takes place

(Isenbarger and Zembylas 2006, p.132)

In her discussion of what it means to allow one’s emotions to invade the professional boundaries of practitioner/carer, Robinson (2003) refers to ‘The personal in the professional’ and contends:

It is who the professional is as a person and how they carry out their work that will ultimately influence what they actually do and how their interventions will be perceived and even implemented by those at the receiving end. It is *such* a responsibility that I often wonder whether we fully appreciate it when we undertake our initial training

(Robinson, 2003, p.159)

If, as Noddings argues, *ethical caring* as opposed to *natural caring* is one that develops from a position of being *cared for*, it would seem reasonable and unsurprising to suggest that practitioners who have been deprived of this experience are less likely to be able to offer the intellectual ethic of caring, let alone love which I argue is so important for young children, especially babies. I am not suggesting practitioners who have been deprived of the experience of being cared for should not work with very young children, rather that practitioners who are working with babies and young children should not only be highly qualified but also emotionally resilient. For, as Noddings puts it: 'It does not depend upon just any ideal of self, but the ideal developed in congruence with one's best remembrance of caring and being cared for' (Noddings, 2003, p.94).

Goldstein and Lake (2000) explored the notion and ethic of caring with a group of 17 students who were training to become teachers. As part of their practical placements and theoretical classroom based activities, the students were asked to keep journals and document their views and beliefs about the ethics of caring in relation to teaching. The findings of the study were that students mostly oversimplified the notion of ethics and could only relate to the media view of the caring teacher loving every child s/he came across or to being distant and 'professional'. It seemed that the students had missed the notion of caring as articulated by Noddings and further interpreted by Goldstein (1999) and could only conclude that caring teachers were *nice* and those who did not care were by definition *not very nice*. Goldstein and Lake (2000) suggest that to begin the debate in training seems to be a good starting point, but the challenge is to continue the dialogue long after the student becomes a qualified teacher. Hult (1979) rejects the notion of '*pedagogical caring*' on the

grounds that it requires close personal relationships which he deems inappropriate and impractical for teachers to develop. Noddings (2003) fiercely refutes this, arguing that it is exactly what is needed for teachers! I would add that this is exactly what practitioners who work with babies and young children need especially if they are in the role of the *key person*.

### ***3.3vi: Love and Policy: Teetering on the Edge***

*The Solihull Approach* (Solihull NHS Primary Care Trust 2004) is a training package aimed at a raft of professionals working in the early years and designed to support and promote psychological well-being in young children. It seeks to bring together a range of strategies to support the work of professionals that straddle policy initiatives and guidance documents which ultimately require a common discourse (*Every Child Matters: Change for Children Programme*; DfES, 2004; *The National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services* DoH, 2004; and *Promoting Children's Mental Health Within Early Years and School Settings*, DfES, 2001b). The theoretical model put forward in the *Solihull Approach* explores the concepts of containment, reciprocity and behaviour management. The two concepts of containment and reciprocity fit to some extent with Noddings' (1984) feminist moral theory of the ethics of care and education but the third concept of behaviour management suggests for me that the largely uncharted territory of love, (which I think should be the third element) has been omitted and instead been replaced with a 'safe' and practical coping strategy for parents to manage their children's behaviour. This is what leads me to suggest that policy is 'teetering on the edge' of 'love' but exploration is minimal for fear of the unknown consequences. If the present policy agenda is to encourage mothers to return to work, and if part of the enactment of this

policy involves creating childcare places then parents, especially mothers, should be given a real choice about the people who care for and educate their children. Does a mother returning to work after the birth of her baby want a practitioner to get close to her child? To love him or her? To be the one *cared for*? Surely the only way practitioners can find out the answer to such questions is to enter into a dialogue with the mother? Entering into a discussion about the ethics of care and love is equally as important and relevant to parents and their children as any discussion about cognitive ability or practical routines. If a child was allergic to a specific brand of milk or if s/he had a syndrome, medical or learning need any responsible practitioner would want to know how best to meet the individual needs of the child and the parent? By gently and sensitively beginning a careful, thoughtful dialogue with the adult and by gradually build a trusting open relationship these things would be discussed. But, this does not always come naturally and, as Noddings suggests, 'It is precisely because the tendency to treat each other well is so fragile that we must strive so consistently to care' (Noddings, 2003, p.99).

Love is not easily defined, and it is not always easy to talk about love, but not discussing love implies that the topic is in some way taboo. As Noddings (2003) points out 'It is absurd to suppose that we are educating when we ignore those matters that lie at the very heart of human existence' (p.184). I argue that love *is* one of those matters at the heart of human existence.

Writing on the subject of child well-being, Howarth (2008) draws on the examples of two social workers. She highlights the stability and constancy of the role of the social worker in the cases of two individuals who had been brought up in care. In one case,

the social worker had maintained contact throughout the child's life into adulthood and attended his funeral. In the second example the child, who had experienced indescribable abuse and heartache but grew up to maintain a stable loving relationship and family attended the funeral of the social worker. In both cases the social workers had offered a close loving relationship based on a professional association. The social workers, in their roles as *loco parentis*, each provided the children (and later adults) with trust and love.

The Principal of an Academy School in Croydon recently described how his 'transformational approach to learning has improved behaviour' (Knowles, 2008). Mr Murphy was appointed to improve the school's reputation and the educational attainment of the schools pupils and was interviewed as part of a discussion around the notion of corporal punishment in schools. In the initial interview Mr Murphy was reported to have said to the *Guardian*:

"We treat all our students with respect and want them to get the most out of their education... We care for our students: 17 members of staff ran up Ben Nevis the other weekend raising money to help pay for some of our students to go on our annual ski trip."

(Knowles, 2008,p.u)

And later during his television interview on the BBC 'OneShow' Mr Murphy said:

"As adults we have to be really good role models. We have to show them that they are accepted, that they are *loved* and valued...."

(my emphasis)

Gradually the word *love* has been creeping into policy, for example, in practice guidance documents such as the *Birth to Three Matters Framework* (DfES, 2002) and the *Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework for children from birth*

*to five years in England* (DCSF, 2008a). On the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007, the new Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls announced a new funding stream to promote projects to enhance children's well-being. He said:

Our aspirations are straightforward and ambitious. Every child deserves to be safe and *loved* and have a healthy and happy childhood, free from harm. And every child should have the chance to make the most of their talents and fulfil their potential....To do this, we must provide excellent universal services for all children and their families; be able to identify potential problems early, before things go wrong; and when children are at risk, do something quickly to help children and their families get back on track.

(Every Child Matters, DCSF, 2007, [my emphasis])

The inclusion of the word 'loved' implied a policy shift – or at least a new emphasis and recognition of the importance of love in provision for young children. However, the speech related to educational attainment levels and school targets or what Noddings (2003) would describe as the '*masculine model*'. I was disappointed at first that love was not held up to be discussed because it is worthy of discussion in its own right. However, on reflection, to twin the terms *love* with *educational attainment* suggested to me perhaps the policy makers were starting to recognise the two are intrinsically linked and therefore for the highest possible educational attainment to be reached, a child must be safe and to know they are loved.

Confirmation from the policy makers perhaps that loving reciprocal relationships are at the very heart of well-being. Therefore to deny the dialogue of the place of the ethics of love and loving seems to me to deny babies and children the minutiae of secure, loving attachments with their close significant adults.

### **3.3vii: Love and Kissing**

It is reasonable to understand that parents may worry about the practice of just 'anyone' kissing their child(ren). This concern could be related to the passing on of infectious diseases or viruses to the child, or alternatively be simply they feel repulsed by the prospect of their child being subjected to such close intimate behaviour from a relative 'stranger' (Babycenter, 2004). In my experience practitioners do not converse with parents about when or even if it is appropriate to kiss a child. Yet given the close relationships that are necessarily fostered particularly between babies and their key person(s) (Elfer, *et al.* 2003; DCSF, 2008a) it seems a highly pertinent discussion. A search of the literature using the key search terms 'kissing' and 'baby kissing' yielded only four relevant research articles. Senter (2006) investigated the experiences of 21 participants of being loved as a child and their memories from childhood which included physical affection – holding and kissing as they related to the parent child relationship. The longitudinal study by Ainsworth, *et al.* (1978) was based on the attachment behaviour between mothers and their babies in the first year of life. The 26 white middle class mothers and their babies were all observed at home during 4 one hour visits at 3 week intervals during the child's first year. The extent to which the mothers reacted to their child's distress was observed in relation to hugging, cuddling and kissing.

Piper and Smith (2003) discuss the dilemmas - the 'moral panic' around child protection and abuse faced by professionals who work with children in relation to holding, touching, and kissing. On the whole their discussion focuses on those who work with older children such as teachers in schools. However, the point they make is very real for practitioners who are fearful and anxious about child protection



issues. Unfortunately, although they note the importance of close contact for very young children, the authors suggest that literature promoting close attachments between adults and young children is generally aimed at parents and grandparents as opposed to practitioners in early years settings. I suggest that to ignore the importance of discussion about close attachments outside the family can fuel the debate and suggest to practitioners they have every need to be unnecessarily cautious, rather than to try to find solutions to overcome such increased anxiety. Piper and Smith do include an example of a female teacher in a child care setting in a study carried out by Johnston (2000) who continued to behave 'instinctively' toward the child confident that her practice was based on her intention to nurture the child. It can be difficult for practitioners to behave and speak with such confidence as the teacher in Johnston's (2000) study. I suggest if practitioners are to be able to be confident in their relationships with children and their parents' further debate is needed about appropriate close attachments with support for practitioners about how they might engage parents in such conversation. I suggest such a discussion should take place at the point of training, perhaps using a similar approach to the one in Goldstein and Lake's (2000) study with teachers. I would argue that discussions about reciprocal, loving relationships between the key person and their key children should be ongoing and frequent as part of a regular discourse within every high quality early years setting.

When practitioners form close relationships with babies and small children it may or may not include kissing them. It is, I propose, impossible for practitioners to know if such practice is acceptable to a child, a parent or within the context of their setting unless they are encouraged to debate such value laden topics with others, free of fear

or anxiety that they are somehow doing something wrong or behaving unprofessionally.

Having discussed the literature in relation to attachment theory, I will now move on to the final section of this Chapter to discuss the policy perspective including a discussion of both national and international contexts and the place of quality within the perspectives of policy in England and internationally.

### **3.4: The Policy Perspective in England**

#### ***3.4i: Policy Perspectives on Childcare in England since 1989***

Change has been the nature of policy in England for the last twenty years. The rapid and radical pace of policy transformation has been influenced by a range of factors which include a difference in: family patterns; life style in response to employment (particularly with regard to the increase in women returning to work and study); increased demand for childcare; increase in ethnic diversity; and central government legislation resulting in a change to the way in which children are cared for, and learn, both in and out of home settings. A key shift in policy came with the *1989 Children Act* (DOH, 1991) which was an important first step in bringing together the many different forms of services for young children (0-8 years) under one piece of legislation. *The Act* supported the need for day care services with positive acceptance and encouragement (as opposed to the judgement of 'disapproval'). *The Act* also offered practical solutions on how to achieve strategies to 'join up' and co-ordinate services between Education and Social Service departments. However, other more recent legislation tended to focus more specifically on the needs of children over the age of three years, for example the *Education Reform Act* (1988), introduced a

*National Curriculum* for children of five years and beyond, and seemed to contradict the ethos of the *Children Act 1989*. *The Rumbold Report* (DES, 1990) examined the educational experiences offered to children aged three and four (although it made reference to children under three) and proposed that children of all ages should be offered quality experiences comparable to those received by children in school.

Jackson (1992) suggested that, because at this time, the expansion of childcare provision was seen within the private and voluntary sector that the quality of care envisaged within the *Children Act 1989* would be virtually impossible to provide at an affordable cost to parents with sufficient financial return for the provider. Hence she feared the government would lower standards of provision instead of investing in the sector to raise standards, maintain quality and ensure the benefits for children.

*The Nursery and Grant-Maintained Schools Act* (DfEE1996) gave the *Office for Standards in Education* (OFSTED) the power to inspect the quality of learning in early years settings.

In 1998 the (then new) Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair, launched *The National Childcare Strategy* in response to the Green Paper '*Meeting the Childcare Challenge*' (DfEE, 1998). Although the strategy was set against the back drop to support families, there was a definite sea change about good quality childcare being 'good for children' (DfEE, 1998, foreword) the government's intention was clear; it was about parents [read mothers] returning to work. As noted by Lewis (2003), this presented a definite shift in thinking. The strategy set out four key areas that required attention with regard to early education and childcare in England. These were *quality, affordability, availability and diversity of childcare*. Additional

responsibility was given to the already existing *Early Years Development Partnerships*, which became Early Years Development and *Childcare Partnerships* (EYDCP) to embrace childcare services. Each EYDCP was expected to produce an annual strategic plan to set out their intention to meet needs of the local community. Tony Blair promised to address regulation of day care services, quality of registered provision and to develop a framework of qualifications for those working in the sector. Concern had already been raised about the paucity and poor quality of day care provision for babies and children under three years of age (Moss, 1986; Melhuish, 1990; Melhuish and Moss, 1990) and it was clear that guidelines were needed to ensure that any care provided was appropriate to the age and 'stage' of the child (DfEE 1998, p.4).

At the same time, whilst the 'free' educational places for three and four year olds were welcomed, concern about the rise in costs for baby places was highlighted. An *Early Excellence Centre* (DfEE, 1997) programme was set up in 1997 to develop models of good practice through a range of services designed to meet the local needs of communities. Then in their 1998 spending review the government introduced the *Sure Start* (DfEE, 1998) early intervention programme specifically designed to be a programme of support for young children under the age of four years in areas of high deprivation in the UK.

In 2001 in direct response to a government Green Paper (DfEE 2000a) *'Birth to Three Matters: a framework to support our youngest children'* (DfES/Sure Start 2002) was launched after consultation with practitioners, children, parents, policy makers, and researchers. In the initial stages, there were concerns about 'curricula for babies' (Womack and Lightfoot, 2005) and worries over the development of a

‘watered down’ version of the *Foundation Stage* (DfEE, 2000b, my emphasis).

Elfer (2002) advised that the framework, whilst developing practice, should also inspire policy makers and offer guidance to practitioners on handling their relationships with young children. Practitioners, he argued, needed help to strike the delicate balance between offering physical care and attention and forming an emotional bond with the child that did not seek to replace the affections of the parent and evoke feelings of envy towards the practitioner (key person). Manning-Morton and Thorp (2001) and Goldschmied and Jackson, (1994, 2004) suggested the key was to offer strong personal relationships with small children.

The Early Childhood Unit at the National Children’s Bureau (NCB) set out an Early Years timeline which covers the period from 1990-2008 and details legislation, policy and initiatives and additional guidance documents (NCB, 2009). The timeline is sixteen pages in total and highlights the fact that Early Years and Childcare Policy has been at the forefront of the Labour Government agenda since they first came into power in 1997. However, this unrelenting pace of policy development has resulted in a plethora of unwieldy documents and ever-changing policy web sites. The challenges for practitioners’ remains to not only keep up with the pace of change, but to make sense of these changes and to interpret them into meaningful everyday practice with babies and young children.

In November 2002, the Inter-departmental Childcare review reported on, ‘*Delivering for Children and Families*’ and set out the government’s intentions for spending in 2005/2006. Although some of the 1998 *National Childcare Strategy* plans had been implemented, major reform in relation to the delivery of services was still required for the targets of good quality affordable childcare set out in the 1998 strategy to be

realised. The main emphasis was on funding. The responsibility for services was devolved to local authorities to be delivered at local level to meet the needs of local communities via *Children's Centres*. This was later complemented by the roll out of the *National Extended Schools Programme* (DfES, 2005a) to support parents who wished to work and required 'wraparound' childcare for their children outside of the school day. *Children's Centres* were built upon the success of the former *Sure Start* programme and intended to offer good early years education and childcare, health services, family support, parental outreach and a base for childminders. They were first established in the 20 per cent most disadvantaged electoral wards but were eventually planned to provide universal accessible services for all communities in England. The impact of the Inter- Departmental review meant an unprecedented programme of change both nationally and locally and the sector struggled to keep abreast of the plethora of initiatives and complex funding streams (Nutbrown, *et al.* 2008).

The most radical change, though, was brought about by the Green Paper, '*Every Child Matters*' (ECM) (DfES, 2003) following the Lord Laming inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié. The Green Paper proposed 'Radical improvement in opportunities and outcomes for children, driven by whole system reform of the delivery of children's services' (Every Child Matters, 2005 p.3). The Laming Inquiry heavily criticised the missed opportunities by a number of organisations who could potentially have saved the life of the child who died at the hands of those family members who should have been responsible for her health and well-being.

The *Every Child Matters* website detailed the strategy of change as follows:

The *Every Child Matters* Green Paper was published for consultation in September 2003. In March 2004, the Government published *Every Child Matters: next steps*. The new Children Act 2004 provides the legal framework for the programme of reform. *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* published in December 2004, brings together all the ways we are working towards improved outcomes for children, young people and families into a national framework for 150 local-authority-led change programmes.

(Every Child Matters, 2005, Aims and outcomes)

The *Programme for Change* was linked to five key outcomes to well-being both during childhood and in later life, which was informed, during the consultation process, by the voices of children and young people. It was proposed the five outcomes: *Being healthy; Staying Safe; Enjoying and Achieving; Making a Positive Contribution; Achieving Economic Well-being* would help to bridge the gap and lessen the divide between disadvantaged children and their peers resulting in better outcomes for *all* children. Early years and Childcare providers first experienced the implications of the *Programme for Change* in October 2005, when they were inspected by Ofsted against the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes. For children under three years of age this was the first time that an inspection had measured directly the impact of the '*Birth to Three Matters*' Framework ( DfES/Sure Start 2002) and the first time that inspectors were asked to make specific judgements about provision for and progress of babies and toddlers.

The need to protect and safeguard all children, whilst offering them the freedom to enjoy, achieve and make a positive contribution ultimately resulting in achieving economic well-being, could not be denied. Yet, the reforms were so radical and so rapid that it was perhaps easy for policy makers to lose sight of 'the individual child'

when planning within this massive agenda. *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* (HMT, 2004) required a total revision of working practices and fundamental ethos as local authorities became the key agents for ‘co-ordinating, supporting and delivering childcare services’ (HMT, 2004, p57). As part of their devolved responsibility to deliver the outcomes from the Ten Year Childcare Strategy (HMT, 2004), local authorities were required to consult with a range of partners including parents in order to deliver co-ordinated, integrated front line services building upon agreements in the form of *Children’s Trusts*. Vincent and Ball (2006) noted the clear intention that ‘The provision of childcare is seen as having the potential to bring women back into the workforce, thereby increasing productivity...’ (p, 30).

The Childcare Act 2006 was a landmark piece of legislation because it ‘provided for the establishment of the *Early Years Foundation Stage a single high quality care, learning and development framework for children from birth to five* (EYFS) (DfES, 2007; DCSF, 2008a) and included the provision to totally reform the regulation and inspection of childcare services in England, including the establishment of two childcare registers (up to age 5 and over 5 years) (ECU, 2008, p.9). Furthermore, the Act placed an outcomes duty on local authorities around the four themes of *choice and flexibility, availability, quality and affordability* to:

Improve outcomes for young children and reduce the gaps between them;  
secure sufficient childcare to enable parents to work; provide information to  
parents about childcare and a wide range of services that may be of benefit to  
them in bringing up their children

(ECU, 2008, p.9)



In relation to this thesis the point here is that early years practitioners have had to face a raft of changes and initiatives over a relatively brief period of time which has necessarily shifted their focus. The result being that their priorities have been inspection regimes (Ofsted, 2005), funded nursery education (DCSF, 2008b) and childcare workforce strategies (CWDC, 2008). These changes have coincided with policies to encourage mothers back into work and the messages about the *quality, affordability, availability* and *diversity of childcare* has become more and more complicated.

### ***3.4ii: Policy Context and the Early Years Workforce***

At the heart of quality provision lies the quality of the practitioners who work with children in their early years (Sylva, *et al.*, 2004; Walsh and Gardner, 2005; Melhuish, 2006). If as reported in section 3.2ii, parents want practitioners who care for their children to be ‘warm and loving’, Pungello and Kurtz-Costes (1999, p.69) then I suggest practitioners need to be the *most* highly qualified practitioner to be able to offer such quality interaction. In England the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is responsible for the registration and inspection of early years and childcare providers, and until 2008 the rubric was against a set of minimum National Standards<sup>1</sup>. Since September 2008, inspections have been carried out using the learning and development requirements of the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) (DCSF, 2008a).

Ministers recognised that increasing the number of early years and childcare places was dependent on having: ‘A highly skilled workforce’ and ‘Working with children

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<sup>1</sup> The National Standards under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

is a demanding, skilled profession' (DfES 1999, p.1). However, Penn (2000) argued that, until social policy is challenged, childcare will continue to be a gendered occupation with a high turnover of staff. Pugh (2001) suggested that research over the past decade had pointed to a number of issues which required attention in order to improve the quality services for children. Pugh pointed out the 'severe shortage of affordable day care for children under 3 years of age' (2001, p.24). The important point here is that the government intention was to encourage women back into the workforce but with a shortage of suitable childcare and lack of suitably trained staff mothers were unlikely to feel confident about leaving their babies to return to work.

(see *Table 3.1*)

***Table 3.1***

***Pugh's List of Reasons for Lack of Quality in Early Years and Childcare Provision***

A chronic shortage of trained staff in all sectors
A lack of qualifications amongst those working with children under 5 years of age in the private and voluntary sector
A huge range of different qualifications
The inappropriateness of the content of teaching training for nursery and infant teachers, with a curriculum that neglects child development.
The high proportion of teachers in reception classes in schools who are not trained to work with such young children
A lack of funding for training, whether through the NVQ route or through teachers training
A lack of interface between the developing Early Years national Training Organisation (responsible for accrediting NVQ – related qualifications taken by playgroup leaders, nursery nurses, childminders, etc) and the Teacher Training Agency's role in training teachers.

Source: (adapted from Pugh, 2001)

The government's commitment to a workforce reform strategy in a bid to improve quality was built on the findings of the *Rumbold Report* (DES, 1990) which confirmed the need for highly trained professionals with respectful values and attitudes, and with the skills and knowledge to interpret the needs of young children and their families. The importance of high quality training is not a new phenomenon. Several reports have highlighted the need for high calibre training (DES, 1990; National Commission on Education, 1993; Ball, 1994; DfEE, 1999a; 1999b).

In the wake of Government proposals, the *Children's Workforce Development Council* (CWDC) was set up with the task of early years workforce reform in relation to the skills of those required to lead the EYFS (DCSF, 2008a). In 2006 the CWDC set out their aims:

... to improve the lives of children and young people. ... this by ensuring that the people working with children have the best possible training, qualifications, support and advice. It helps children and young people's organisations and services to work together, so that the child is at the centre of all our services.

(CWDC, 2006, Homepage)

In 2007 the first cohort of practitioners were awarded *Early Years Professional Status* (EYPS). EYPS was intended to be equivalent to *Qualified Teacher Status* (QTS), *National Vocational Qualifications* (NVQ) level six. The role of the EYP is to lead the practice (CWDC, 2008) within the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (DCSF, 2008a) and therefore to work hands on with children and alongside other practitioners to 'develop, introduce, lead and supervise developmental work with children under the age of five' (CWDC, 2008). The government has undoubtedly invested significant amounts of money to improve training and up skill the early years workforce (Every Child Matters, 2009). However, it has still failed to properly

recognise the very specific needs of babies and very young children and the highly specialist skills required by the practitioners who work with them. A high level of concern has remained about the interpretation of the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) (DCSF, 2008a) to meet the needs of the youngest children. Essentially the concern has been focused on the prescribed curriculum as a *requirement* rather than as best practice guidance (Gaunt, 2008; Woolcock, 2008; Open Eye Campaign, 2008).

Melhuish (2008) has stated that “we don’t have the staff capital in terms of many years of training like the Scandinavian countries” whilst Brooke (2008) argues, “The nub of it is high quality settings and we have to face up to the fact we do not have a quality professional well-paid workforce across the board” and expresses concern about children being in ‘unqualified hands’ (Brooke, 2008).

In a recent report on the progress of the *Ten Year Childcare Strategy* the government made the following claim

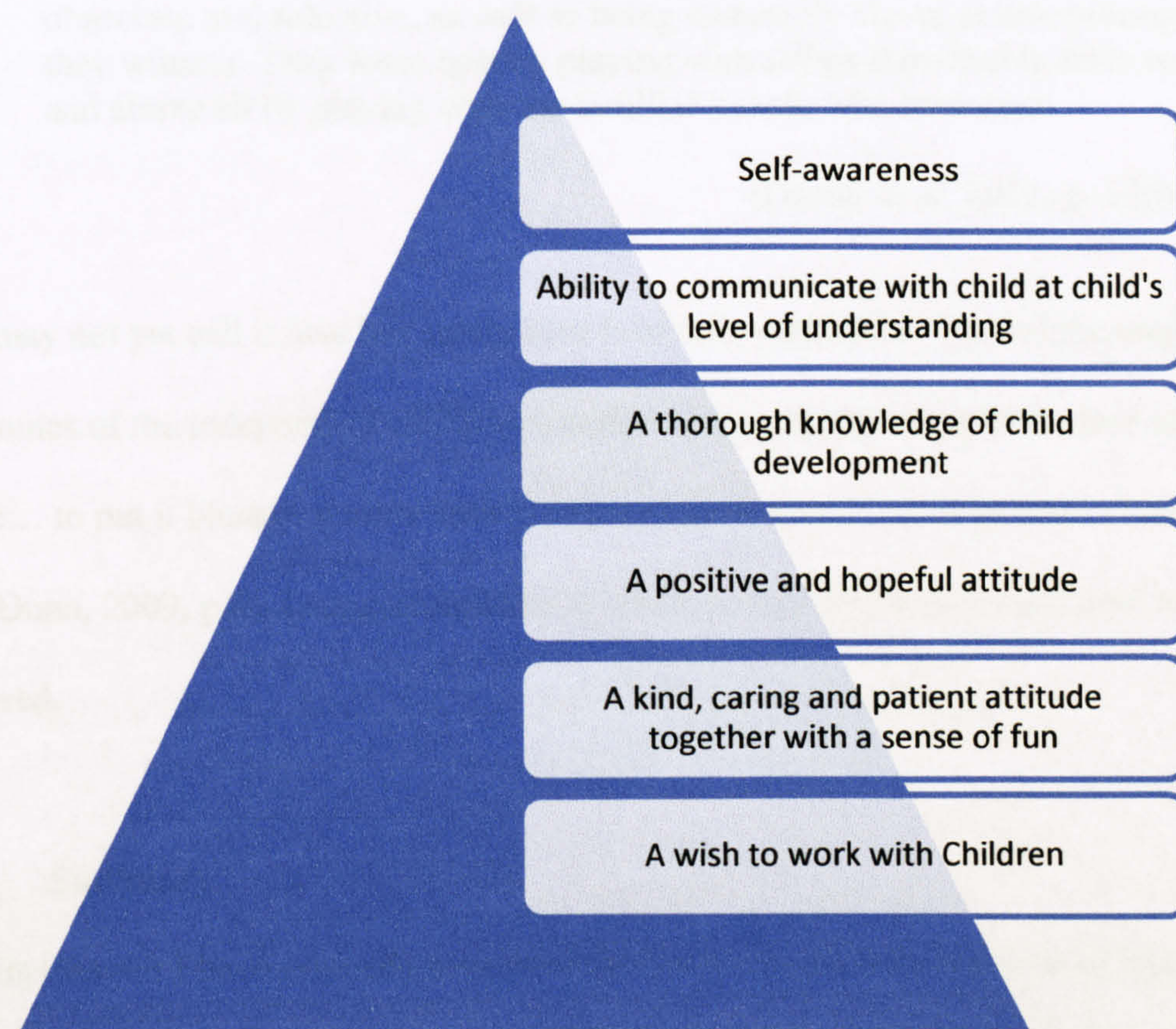
The early years workforce is made up of capable and dedicated practitioners, but the PVI sector has typically been viewed as a low pay sector with high turnover of staff, and relatively low levels of formal qualifications. Careers in the early years are often not viewed as having the same value or status as careers in other parts of the children’s workforce. This needs to change. We need to carry on attracting talented people and leaders into the workforce and improve the perception of working in childcare and early years so that it is seen as a more attractive long-term career.

(HMT, 2009, p. 43)

However, it continues to neglect to increase levels of pay or to recognise the specific style of support required by those practitioners who work with babies and infants.

Robinson (2003) translated Maslow's hierarchy of need into what she considers are the 'ideal attributes for early years professionals' (p.10). I suggest the final and highest attribute of 'self- awareness' or self- actualisation in Robinson's hierarchy is still where the concentration of efforts is needed the most (*see Figure 3.1*)

**Figure 3.1** *Ideal Attributes for Early Years Professionals*



(Source: adapted from Robinson, 2003, p.10)

Practitioners who work with the youngest children need support to manage their 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983). Linsey and McAuliffe (2006) suggest that the childcare agenda is 'primarily focused on the needs of parents and families to respond to changing working patterns and balancing work and family life' (p.404). I suggest that this it is exactly why practitioners who work with all children, but *especially* those working with babies and children under three years of age must be

supported to reach *self actualisation*. This is important for practitioners to be able to 'offer opportunities for children to grow up with *good* attachment' (Day Care Trust 2007, p.5) and to be able to offer opportunities for children to grow up with parental '*permission*' to form *loving* attachments to the key practitioners with whom they spend much of their everyday lives.

Babies come already 'designed', or 'programmed', to be deeply interested in the people and world in which they find themselves. They are incredibly observant and selective, as well as being extremely clever at interpreting what they witness. They learn best by playing with things they find in their world, and above all by playing with the familiar people who love them.

(David, *et al.* 2003, p. 150)

We may not yet call it *love* but surely love is exactly what it is? One of the major outcomes of the independent childhood inquiry suggests 'the need for a more caring ethic... to put it bluntly, a more caring society based upon the law of love' (Layard and Dunn, 2009, p.6). I suggest that this is where policy attention should now be focused.

### **3.5: Summary**

In this Chapter I have critically reviewed the literature related to the role of women in the workforce and the choices and dilemmas faced by mothers when making decisions about whether to return to work or not when their babies are under a year old. I have discussed the position of mothers in the workforce since 1989 and discussed international studies. I have considered the place of attachment theory and drawn upon the broad body of literature that exists. I have drawn on the literature to argue for practitioners to receive specific support and training to enable them to work more effectively in their role as a key person. I have suggested that high calibre

training should includes opportunities for practitioners to fully appreciate the need for them to be sensitive, loving and suitably qualified if they are to be able to understand the complexities and unique qualities required to care for babies and very young children. Drawing on Noddings' feminist moral theory of the ethics of care, I have argued for the place of love as a crucial phenomenon in the debate about the preferences of mothers regarding their choice of childcare. I have concluded the Chapter with a discussion of the current policy context in England and suggested the decision making process for mothers about whether or not to return to work when their babies are young is a unique, often idiosyncratic process.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Methods and Methodology**

#### **4.1: Introduction**

This Chapter provides an overview and justification of the methods I developed and the methodological issues which were key to this study. Section 4.2 discusses how and why I developed the research questions in relation to the topic focus, before moving on to argue my position and the place of feminist methodology. In this section (4.2) the ‘frame’ for the study is considered in relation to the work of Noddings’ (1984) feminist moral theory of ethics, care and education going beyond her theoretical framework to what I have termed ‘professional love’. Section 4.3 is a critical overview of methodological approaches used in studies of mothers, work and childcare and discusses the process I went through to plan a method of inquiry for this thesis. This is followed in section 4.4 by a consideration of life history in qualitative research and its place within this study. The Chapter then justifies the research design and examines some of the ethical issues associated with a life history approach (section 4.5). Finally the Chapter concludes with an explanation of the way in which the interviews were carried out and a deliberation on the specific dilemmas and challenges related to this study, ending with a brief introduction of how the women’s life stories are told as *Interpreted Narratives*

#### **4.2: Research questions**

My intended research questions were formulated with the current political agenda, regarding encouraging women back into the workforce, in mind (HMSO, 2004; Vincent and Ball, 2001, 2006). I wanted to investigate if mothers with young babies



considered they had a choice, or not, over whether to return to employment and, if so, what they felt those choices were. My urge to investigate this stemmed from my own position as a working mother of three children. Having worked throughout my children's early childhoods, I was convinced that some of the dilemmas and challenges I had faced were not necessarily particular to my own circumstances. Coupled with my role as an early years educator, I knew from my experience of working closely with parents, especially mothers, that the decision-making process about the return to work and solutions to childcare were complicated and challenging with very little universal agreement about how or why such decisions were reached. I also wanted to investigate how and why mothers made their childcare choices. I wanted to gather their views, to see things through their eyes, and to hear their voices. I wanted to delve deeply into the lives of mothers with young babies and try to understand if they considered they had a choice at all, and if so how this was influenced.

In my role as a mother and as an early years educator I had experienced both sides of the same coin. I considered that relationships, and for me the notion of love, had proved to be the key determinate in both these roles. As a mother, I knew that I had wanted my children to be more than just *liked* by the practitioners who cared for them at their nursery. I wanted the adults who looked after my babies to *love* them as well. I also considered that the close bonds and relationships I had established with children and families during my roles in education could be conceived as 'love'. It seemed to me the two concepts of i) the choice to return to work or not, and ii) a mother's view of the practitioner, (essentially how the adult responds to her baby), were critical factors in relation to the decision-making process. I wanted to know if

mothers of babies under a year old, wanted other adults unrelated to them, and with whom they had a professional relationship, to love their babies or not.

**4.2i: Formulating the questions**

Figure 4.1 shows my mind mapping process. I developed two lists of key terms: the first of issues I wanted to research *The role of practitioners in the Education and Care divide* (blue), the second of *methodology* (green). By combining the key terms with questions such as: ‘who, why, what, when, where, how’ I was able to formulate my research questions.

**Figure 4.1 Mind Mapping Key Terminology**

<i>Key Issues</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>Key aspects of Methodology</i>
Topic	Where?	Literature
Babies		Depth
Childcare	What?	Analysis
Love		Sample
Mothers	Why?	Position
Work		Purpose
Views	How?	Justify
Beliefs		Policy
Dilemmas	Whose?	Detail
Quality		Report
Choice	When?	Feminist
Feelings		Method
Decisions		Ethics
Context		Persuasion
Voice		
Carers		

By breaking the key terms down further I was able to define the ‘what, why and who’ in relation to for example: What was the topic? What was the purpose of the study? Why focus on mothers? What kind of sample? Whose voice would be important? Then I applied the same approach to the ‘when’, ‘where’ and ‘how’

questions to identify the approach most suited to the research design. For example: When would the research take place? When and how would I elicit the views of the mothers? How would I analyse the data?

By defining the responses to the combination of the key terms I identified my research as qualitative rather than quantitative in approach. I was not designing research that involved the collection of data that required numerical data analysis (Blaxter, *et al.* 2001). I was more concerned with gathering detailed views from a small number of participants, so it was depth rather than breadth that justified a qualitative approach (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007; Cohen, *et al.* 2007; Silverman, 2006; 2007). This will be discussed later in this Chapter in section 4.3ii

### **Research question 1**

**What factors are women in England likely to need to take into consideration when making employment decisions and childcare choices when their babies are under twelve months of age?**

This question focused the study on the identification of those things which mothers of babies and young children weigh up when making decisions about their own employment and provision of care for their children. I wanted also to investigate the thoughts and feelings of the participants about the place of love in early childhood care and education which led me to my second research question.

## **Research question 2**

**What importance, if any, do mothers place on having carers in day care settings who ‘love’ their children?**

This question necessitated sensitive probing of qualities participants considered to be important when choosing provision for their babies and the qualities they sought in the adults with whom their children spent time. This question took me further into exploring the relationship of my own theoretical position discussed in section 4.2iii with the views of the women who agreed to be participants in the study.

### **4.2ii: *Positionality***

All social research sets out with specific *purposes* from a particular *position*, and aims to *persuade* readers of the significance of its claims; these claims are always broadly *political*.

(Clough and Nutbrown, 2007, p 4)

Clough and Nutbrown’s (2007) perspective of social research as persuasive, purposive, positional and political informed my approach to this thesis.

As I have already explained, throughout my childhood and as far back as I can recall I have always been fascinated by the amazing capacity for learning of babies and young children. In my teenage years I formed close, deep and sustaining relationships with children and families with whom I was a regular babysitter. I frequently stayed on to play with the children long after the parents had returned home from their afternoon out, or responded to parent requests to arrive early to ‘sing the baby to sleep,’ while the parents got ready for their evening out. I genuinely *loved* the babies and children with whom I was entrusted and was never made to feel

uncomfortable or that I was somehow behaving in any way that was unacceptable. Later on in my career, I continued to apply this same approach with children and their families. I did not seek to undermine or take away any of the love that was due to the parent, especially the mother. The close relationships which I formed with children who have been unrelated to me have led me to believe that I have been somehow given *permission* by the adults in the numerous families with whom I have worked, to love their children. When I became a working mother for the first time, I yearned for the practitioners who worked with my baby to love him very much. I was not jealous when my son held out his arms to his favourite practitioner, nor was I upset or confused if she swept my baby into her arms embracing him with her whole body. I was relieved, grateful even, that she cared enough about my son to offer him such a close intense and intimate pattern of care. Although I experienced a range of feelings including guilt, frustration and exhaustion associated with my decision to return to work, I knew that if my child was loved by the adults who cared for him and he was happy, then I could cope with my decision to return to work. This was repeated following the birth of my youngest son and subsequent return to work.

This study is based on my firm belief that I am not alone in this view. I believe that when mothers are making decisions about whether to return to work, or not, when their babies are under a year old, having a practitioner – a key person, who loves their child is crucial to their decision-making. I suggest that mothers want the person who cares for their baby to form a close, sensitive, loving, reciprocal relationship. I propose that mothers want their baby's key person to love their baby – not in the same way as they do, but a professional love that can only happen when the practitioner is really in tune with the baby, and the mother has been able to grant the

practitioner permission to love her baby...but perhaps not too much.

#### **4.2iii: Feminist Methodology**

In Chapter Two, I introduced Noddings' (1984) feminist moral theory of ethics and care and discussed the location of my theoretical framework in line with Noddings' (1984) theory. However, when I began this study I did not consider myself to be a 'feminist researcher'. Some aspects within feminist research resonated with my experience as a researcher, such as being a woman and studying women's issues, but this did not immediately translate into being a 'feminist' (Wallin,2008)., although that is not necessarily to say *only* women can study feminist issues. Part of my reasoning was due to my earlier experiences and understanding of feminism associated with women who had been at the source of difference in relation to class, ethnicity, mobility, domestic violence, poverty and so on ( Plummer, 2001; Olesen,2005). I had associated being a feminist with someone who stood up for those who were necessarily underprivileged, marginalised by the colour of their skin or as a victim of domestic violence, for example, who therefore felt compelled to stand up for women's rights (Bunch 1990) . Human rights, (OHCHR, 2009) particularly the rights of both women and children, (*ibid*) mattered and continue to matter a great deal to me. However, although I considered issues related to marginalisation might have been present during the process of this study, it was not intended to be a dominant theme at the outset, by virtue of the fact that I was planning to carry out interviews with women. I identified with Hauser's (1997) interpretation of feminism, whereby being part of a so-called sisterhood, signified a sense of belonging; but for me this was not immediately where I had located my approach to this study. Hence, her metaphor 'locked in uneasy sisterhood' (p.123) made sense to me.

I could identify with Ramazanoglu's (1989) point that most women are not feminists, although they may agree with the way in which women's experiences may be told and their voices heard from a feminist perspective. I struggled to articulate my perspective wholly in relation to feminism but identified with Devault's (1990) position regarding the use of language to interpret women's experiences. She suggests that when participants are in an interview, for example, where the words do not exist for women, then they 'learn to translate when they talk about their experiences' (p.101). For women who interview other women, there is a sense of shared understanding and meaning which comes about as part of being a woman. Some would call it women's intuition (Noddings, 2003). For example, if the participant is searching for a word then the interviewer can use her experience of being a woman to offer a suggestion, an interpretation based on her ability to listen and translate. This notion is further confirmed in relation to 'tacit' knowledge and '*Women's Ways of Knowing*' (Belenky, *et al.* 1997). Belenky, *et al.* considered the ways in which the 135 women in their study applied their views and interpretations to their perception of self. The authors argue that women have ways of connecting with each other that are different from those of men. They constructed five definitions of knowing. In *Table 4.1* I have added my summary to each definition in a bid to bring meaning and clarity to their perspective.

**Table 4.1 Interpretation of Women's Ways of Knowing**

<b><i>Ways of Knowing</i></b>	<b><i>Summary</i></b>
Silence	Lacking Confidence to speak out
Received Knowledge	Listening and Learning from others
Subjective Knowledge	Truth as intuitively known
Procedural Knowledge	Dismissing past knowledge and replacing with reasoned reflection
Constructed Knowledge	Knowledge is constructed according to context and connectedness

Adapted from Belenky, *et al.* (1997)

Lather's (1986; 1988) entirely political stance on the design of feminist research, is one where the position of the participant can be shifted, if reciprocity is reached through 'sequential interviewing and a negotiation of meaning through sharing of drafts (Opie 1992 p.62). In Lathers' 'praxis/empowerment/reciprocity paradigm' meaning can be negotiated thereby arriving at a position of shared understanding. Reinharz,(1992) and Maynard (1993) identify building a rapport with the participant as a key feminist theme which fits with Oakley's (1981) articulation of reciprocity

Weiler (2008) examines the place of the 'second-wave feminism (or the women's movement as it was then known)' (p,500) in the USA, which came about just after the war in Vietnam had ended and African Americans had gained full civil rights (*ibid*). Weiler (2008) goes on to position the place of feminism at that time and the tensions which existed across the feminist community. For example, issues with regard to class and colour continued and were misunderstood, which created more



division than unity amongst women. Questions were raised about how privileged white middle class women could understand the position of underprivileged women who were white and poor or black and less well educated. As Fawcett and Hearn (2004) contest 'can men research women, white people, people of colour, or vice versa? (p.201). In this thesis, I identified with the perspective offered by Weiler (2008) in relation to the works of C. Wright Mills (1959) who argued that life and work is inextricably linked.

The original insights of C. Wright Mills and second wave feminists that the *personal is political* informs the analysis of subjects being constructed and constructing themselves through discourses within a material world in which we live in privilege while others must struggle against very long odds to attain dignity and respect.

(Weiler 2008, p.506 [my emphasis])

I intended to interview mothers about their choices of childcare and returning to work. If the women did not consider they had a choice it would suggest, according to Weiler's (2008) definition, that they were marginalised - a personal and political standpoint. Lather (1988) suggests that 'to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the centre of one's enquiry' (p.571) whilst Reinharz (1992) identified ten themes relating to feminist approaches to research:

1. Feminism is a perspective, not a research method
2. Feminists use a multiplicity of research methods
3. Feminist research involves ongoing criticism of non feminist scholarship
4. Feminist research is guided by feminist theory
5. Feminist research may be transdisciplinary
6. Feminist research aims to create social change
7. Feminist research strives to represent human diversity
8. Feminist research frequently includes the researcher as a person
9. Feminist research frequently attempts to develop special relationships with the people studied (in interactive research)
10. Feminist research frequently defines a special relationship with the reader  
(Reinharz, 1992, p.241)

Of course many of the characteristics above can apply to research undertaken by researchers who would not necessarily argue their approaches as feminist. Many studies use a multiplicity of research methods; critique scholarship; are transdisciplinary; aim to create social change; respect human diversity; include the researcher as a person; attempt to develop special relationships with the participants, and seek to define special relationships with the reader. Perhaps, what is different in feminist research, is a strong emphasis on such characteristics as central, what Star (1979) referred to as 'being different on purpose' whereas non –feminist researchers may adopt the above practices but not as part of a gender-related political positionality.

I agree with the idea of feminism as a 'perspective and not a method' and support the view that 'women's lives are important' (*ibid*). My approach to this study of mothers is in relation to the experience of other mothers as opposed to fathers. My purpose for conducting deep level interviews was to give 'voice' to the women - a chance for them to tell their stories. Feminist distrust and feminist belief were important points for my reflection given that I had not considered the place of distrust in relation to the way in which the participants in my study would respond to other individuals, especially other females – women, mothers or indeed children. I was unclear how distrust would manifest itself. If I 'gave voice' to women who marginalised the views of other women, then I had to consider how tension might be invoked in relation to my distrust of the participant and if the element of distrust could only apply to distrust within a Reinharz-defined feminist approach:

Feminism supplies the perspective and the disciplines supply the method. The feminist researcher exists at their intersection – feeling like she has a second shift or double burden, or feeling her research will benefit from the tension. Her feminist perspective is continuously elaborated in the light of a changing world and accumulating feminist scholarship. Feminist research, thus, is grounded in two worlds – the world of discipline, academy or funder, and the world of feminist scholarship. This two–world position is another reason that feminist researchers have to operate both with distrust and belief....

(Reinharz, 1992, p.243)

I identified with Reinharz' ideas when they resonated with my own experience - as a researcher, a woman and also as a working mother. I reflected further upon the list of ten themes and recognised that to some extent, I could analyse gender politics and conflict (1992, p.250) but also that the themes began to make sense to me in a way that previously I had not recognised. For example, Noddings' (1984) theoretical framework has guided this study. Noddings' theory is rooted in philosophy whilst Gilligan, also interested in morality and ethics (Gilligan, 1993), is a psychologist who has raised feminist issues with regard to the voices of women and children, thus confirming Reinharz' view that feminist research may be transdisciplinary. Maynard (1994) claims there has been a long standing argument and critique regarding the feminist approach to research of which, she says, there is no one particular method. Despite the fact that many feminist researchers frequently use interviews as a preferred method in order to investigate views and feelings of participants and to give them a voice, so do some non-feminist researchers. According to Maynard (1994), although it has often been the case that subjective qualitative methods have been favoured for carrying out research with women, it is not always the case. Further, she argues, it need not be, because for example statistics derived from large scale quantitative studies about women have made a difference to women's lives. Such studies exist in relation to domestic violence, poverty and career planning

(Coles and Maynard, 1990). Maynard (1994) suggests such studies can be useful in terms of planning support and influencing social change.

The primary focus for the study reported in this thesis was to listen to the voices of the women talking about a) how becoming a mother had affected their decision-making and b) notions of love. I connected with Gilligan's (1993) ideas about 'perceptions, reality and truth' as opposed to carrying out research *on* women because they were somehow better, worse or different from men (p,viii). Griffiths (1995) argues that personal experience is essential to feminist perspective.

Furthermore, she is adamant that 'the feminist perspective' or a univocal 'feminist theory' is non-existent. (p.5). On the other hand, she argues that feminist research does reflect identity. For Gilligan (1993) the 'how' of listening, knowing, speaking and seeing is a dominant theme in feminist research. Clough and Nutbrown (2007) would term this 'radical *listening*' but would not confine such an approach only to feminist research. Reinharz (1992) argues that for the feminist researcher, the use of personal experience is a 'valuable asset' (p.258) in a way that would not necessarily be deemed to be appropriate or useful in other types of research. She further claims that many feminist researchers will start from the point of their own personal experience, which helps to define and design the study. 'Feminist researchers frequently start with an issue that bothers them personally and then use everything they can get hold of to study it' (*ibid*). I identified with Reinharz' (1992) suggestion. I had begun my research exactly from the place of my own personal experience and my fascination about whether other mothers held similar views to my own. Reinharz asserts that in the case of feminist research 'the "problem" is frequently a blend of an intellectual question and a personal trouble' (p.260).

However, Fawcett and Hearn (2004) argue:

The question as to whether it is possible to carry out qualitative research into areas such as gender, disability and ethnicity without the researcher having immediate points of identification or direct experience of those areas cannot have one simple or straightforward answer

(p, 215)

I was clear from the outset that I would report a reflexive account in this thesis as defined by Reay (1996), 'reflexivity as giving a full and honest account of the research process as possible, in particular explicating the position of the researcher in relation to the researched'.(p.443). To take Olesen's (2005) point on reflexivity, I had to ensure I examined and scrutinised my own position, views and perspectives in the same way and with the same lens as that of my participants. Olesen (2005) concludes 'uncomfortable though this may be, it is a strategy both for feminist qualitative researchers who reach for new experimental approaches and for those who take more familiar paths' (p.257). Although I had not intended to look for 'new experimental approaches' I was aware that in relation to my personal research experience, I had been treading ground which has been explored by others but was new to me in *my* overall approach to this study. Chafetz (2004) argues that when carrying out research essentially related to gender it is the quality of the research that is important, not whether it is feminist methodology. She firmly asserts 'there are no ways of thinking that are inherently masculine, feminine, or feminist'(p.976). She further argues the point that women researchers often become irritated at the thought that they tend to apply softer qualitative approaches. In agreement with Chafetz (2004) and Oakley (1999) I had sought to apply the most appropriate methodology to this study to enable me to answer my research questions. I located my research within Noddings' (1984) theoretical framework because it was appropriate to my

study, not because I determined to locate a feminist methodology. I further identified with Noddings' (2003) position when she argues 'I shall accept the label "feminine" but only if we understand that all of humanity can participate in the feminine as I am describing it' (p, 172).

In her historical overview of feminist perspectives in relation to early childhood education, Goldstein (1993) makes sense of feminism. In her discussion she traces history and reports on more general definitions of feminism, particularly with regard to the oppression of women. She goes on to make a crucial point; women in the 20<sup>th</sup> century had more opportunities than previous female generations with regard to going out to work but this was the first time in history that women had been forced to consider who would care for their children while they engaged in employment. Goldstein (1993) argues that women were always automatically disadvantaged due to their biology. In the human world, only females are able to conceive and give birth. Males were never designed to 'have babies'. Although this point may seem obvious, it is worth noting in relation to how the expectation for women to stay at home and be 'good mothers' came about. Of course the debate about raising children is much more complicated than who in the partnership gives birth and I would argue that it is an advantage to be able to conceive and give birth – a privilege in fact. However, some feminists have argued that women were prevented from making the choice about working and therefore were excluded and oppressed (Goldstein 1993). In relation to this study, Goldstein's perspective is noteworthy; loving children, from a feminist perspective, may offer a way of raising the debate about the need for close, loving, reciprocal relationships as opposed to reprisals about inappropriate

behaviour. This, I suggest, would give mothers and practitioners, be they male or female, a voice about such a notion.

Noddings' work (1984, 2003) gives reasoned argument as to why she considers women have been judged inferior to men in terms of morality. She claims this occurs because women tend to use words aligned to feelings to describe their actions or reasons, whereas men will take on more objective language. Noddings (2003) offers the terms '*caring*' and '*cared-for*' and puts forward a complex theory to argue her point about morality and to set the scene for her interpretation of reciprocity.

Ethical caring, the relation in which we do meet the other morally, will be described as arising out of natural caring – that relation in which we respond as one- caring out of love or natural inclination. The relation of natural caring will be identified as the human condition that we consciously perceive as “good.” It is that condition toward which we long and strive, and it is our longing for caring – to be in that special relation – that provides the motivation for us to be moral. We want to be *moral* in order to remain in the caring relation and to enhance the ideal of ourselves as one-caring

(Noddings, 2003, pp 4-5)

Noddings defines morality and the ethics of caring in relation to the one '*cared for*' and the one '*caring*'. She suggests there is no universal code of ethics and individuals would not necessarily carry out the same approach to the ethics of caring just because it is an ethical dilemma – for example, one may not do as another, as the situation rarely presents as similar. Ethical caring and reciprocity deliberately leaves room for subjectivity and therefore the uniqueness of both the '*cared for*' and the one '*caring*' is identified. Therefore, when the one '*caring*' is able to step out of her (in relation to feminist terminology) own frame of reference into the other's, then the one being '*cared for*' is received by the one '*caring*' and reciprocity is not only

recognised but occurs. It is in relation to Noddings' (1984; 2003) notion of 'motivational displacement' (2003, p.16) that I position my own frame of reference. Motivational displacement is a term used by Noddings to identify and explain the shift in the way in which the one *'caring'* becomes more engrossed in the one being *'cared for'*. Noddings cites the example of herself as a teacher and a student who is struggling in her academic task. She suggests that if the student is a member of her class that as teacher, she demonstrates a level of concern. However, if she is the student's personal tutor there is a shift in the level of concern and enthusiasm she demonstrates. In her personal tutor role she is more motivated and becomes more involved in trying to find ways to support the student to overcome his/her particular difficulty. I suggest motivational displacement can be applied to the role of the practitioner when taking on the role of the key person (Elfer, *et al.*2003) as there is a shift or motivational displacement when caring for children and families. I suggest that for mothers, when they leave their babies and young children with a practitioner who is able to act as the one *caring* and the mother and child as the one *cared for*, true reciprocity occurs. However, I want to argue that it is more than caring, and that love is also part of the process.

As previously discussed in Chapter Three, (3.3vi) Noddings (1984) rejects the notion of agapism in relation to both universal love and the love of God. However, she does concede the term human love. I have termed practitioners', or key person(s') close relationships with babies and children as 'professional love'. Goldstein's (1995) study of love in a classroom setting coined the phrase 'teacherly love'. Taking her position from Noddings' (1984) feminist moral theory, Goldstein (1995) investigated the relationship between the pupils and the two teacher participants in the study in



relation to loving practices within the classroom and how the emergence of love was different from any other type of love. She used observations of classroom practice to identify what she describes as the ‘contributions made by love’ (p.7). It seemed to me that Goldstein offered the terms ‘teacherly love’ and ‘loving teaching’ in a bid to satisfy a definition worthy of use in a professional context and one that is somehow socially acceptable. It would seem that Goldstein was faced with similar barriers to me in her articulation of the difference and yet the sameness of the love in the context in which she carried out her research, hence her regard for such terms.

I found that there is a great deal of ambivalence about the use of the word “love” in educational settings. Even many teachers who acknowledge feeling love for their students shy away from that highly charged word. Nevertheless, I assert that love has important contribution to make to schooling and to education...Loving teaching blends perfectly with the reality of working with young children, as it builds on and further develops the early childhood educator’s responsibility to care for young children...Teaching with love is one possible way to bring children and feminism together in a way that benefits both.

(Goldstein, 1995, p. vii)

In this section I have given a broad perspective of feminist methodology and discussed in more detail why and how taking a feminist approach has been suited to aspects of this study. In section 4.3 I discuss the methodological approaches used by some of the studies of mothers, work and childcare which were reviewed in Chapter Three and conclude with a justification of the methodological position of my own study for this thesis.

#### **4.3: Methodological approaches to studies of mothers, work and childcare.**

In this section, I review the methodological approaches of other studies in the field in order to debate and justify the chosen method for this thesis. These studies have

already been discussed in Chapter Three and it is their methodological aspects which are of particular interest here. The salient methodological points of the following research studies: Hock, , *et al.*. (1984), Brannen and Moss, (1991), Volling and Belsky, (1993), Vincent and Ball, (2001, 2006), Leach, (1997) and Leach, *et al.* (2006) are considered in relation to the aims of the research, sample size, method and whether such methods were intended to report generalised or specific findings.

#### **4.3i: Large scale studies**

In their examination of mothers' attitudes to work following the birth of their first child, Hock, *et al.* (1984) carried out a four-month long study of 317 white married mothers, aged 20 years or over. The participants were recruited from a random selection of women who had given birth to healthy babies in three large hospitals in Ohio and had previously agreed to participate in a study related to employment and motherhood. Although the women were initially interviewed, Hock, *et al.* (1984) did not report on the interview schedule but relied on the results of the questionnaire to inform their large scale study. Questionnaires were the main source of data collection and were given to the participants after the birth of their baby and again when the children were 3 months of age. The aim was to gather the views of the mothers about returning to work when their babies were young.

Hock, *et al.* (1984) used a range of instruments, for example, 'Likert scales such as 'Home/Employment Scale' and the 'Exclusive Maternal Care Scale' to measure the responses. The instruments were specifically designed to enable the participants to respond to closed questions such as 'strongly agree', 'somewhat agree' and 'disagree'. The quantitative datasets generated by the questionnaire were then

analysed to compare the variation identified in the responses. Once analysed, the data were converted to percentages and presented as tabulations in the final report of the findings. One of the drawbacks of using questionnaires in this way was that the feelings and voices of the mothers were not evident. As Cohen, *et al.* (2007) comment 'Highly structured closed questions are useful in that they can generate frequencies of response to statistical treatment and analysis' (p.321). Hock, *et al.* (1984) were drawing on a large-scale sample to generalise their findings in a bid to inform and amend government policy in the USA. In designing my study, I considered the possibility of sampling a larger group of mothers to gather initial interest through a questionnaire. However, I rejected this idea in favour of a smaller sample of respondents using a qualitative approach based on two research questions because i) such studies, had already been carried out, and ii) I could not be sure that questionnaire responses would yield the detailed responses that I wanted, particularly in relation to my second research question. Methods of inquiry (such as questionnaires) which yield quantitative data, would not have helped me to get close to the participants, or to probe deeply the views of the mothers. As Silverman (2007) suggests 'qualitative research is seen as the realm where we study in-depth, people's experiences through a small number of relatively unstructured interviews' (p.40).

Brannen and Moss (1991) investigated the views of mothers who were partnered and where both parents were involved in paid employment. The aims of their study were twofold; firstly, to investigate the intentions of the 255 women who joined the study to return to work within 9 months of giving birth to their first child, and secondly, for those who did attend childcare settings to consider the impact of the childcare environment (a nursery, with a childminder or with a member of the extended

family) upon the child. Changes to the membership and research discipline of the project team influenced and shifted the team's theoretical perspectives, particularly in relation to certain aspects of the topic focus. For example, they became increasingly aware of the importance of the role of the fathers which shifted both their approach to fieldwork methods and the framework for analysis which they claimed:

... implies both a value position that women with children ought to have the same rights to employment as men, who in turn ought to have equal responsibility for children and their upbringing, but also the view that the appropriate unit for study is the household, rather than mother and child.

(Brannen and Moss 1991, p.17)

The justification for the focus on mothers for this thesis was based on UK government policy at the time to encourage more women, mothers in particular, back into the workforce (HMT, 2004), not because I considered fathers' roles to be less important. I wanted to examine the issues that influenced mothers' decisions about when, where and in what circumstances they were prepared to leave their babies and return to work. My position as a working mother was directly relevant and highly influential in shaping the research design. However, Brannen and Moss (1991) raise an important point with regard to feminist perspectives.

The decision to combine the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in their fieldwork changed Brannen and Moss's (1991) original design. The mothers were interviewed at four stages of the study according to the ages of the children as set out in *Table 4.2* below. The interviews varied in length and scope to utilise the opportunity for both structure and freedom. The open ended approach of the long

interviews at the 4th contact allowed the participants to express themselves more freely. The depth of information and detail generated at the 4<sup>th</sup> contact method fits entirely with the life history method I have chosen to use with participants in this thesis.

**Table 4.2** *Brannen & Moss (1991) Field work*

Age of child	Method of data collection	Interview type	Time taken	Mothers who had been continuously employed full time since return from maternity leave
4-5 m 1 <sup>st</sup> contact	Interview	Structured & open ended questions	2 ½ hrs (average)	-
10-11m 2 <sup>nd</sup> contact	Interview	Structured & open ended questions	2¼ hrs (average)	-
Unknown 3 <sup>rd</sup> contact	Interview	Structured	Short	-
Unknown 4 <sup>th</sup> contact	Interview	Structured	Short	-
Unknown 4 <sup>th</sup> contact	Interview	Long semi structured	2 ½ hrs	<b>Additional interview component for 66 women</b>

Brannen and Moss (1991) suggest that having two data sets proved difficult to compare, as in some circumstances the data contradicted each other. However, they were able to determine different uses for each data set which were useful in analysing and reporting on the specific topics for focus within the study. In some instances, the combination of methods added strength, but the authors criticised the ambiguity they considered that can sometimes be attached to qualitative data as it requires a different approach to meaning making than quantitative data.

A qualitative approach tends to throw up contradictions within respondents accounts through its penetration of the fragmented and multifaceted nature of human consciousness, the different elements of which are rarely in total consonance with one another. Not only does this approach reveal contradictions, it also demands interpretations of them

(Brannen and Moss 1991, p.20)

In their longitudinal study Volling and Belsky (1993) sampled 164 married, white, middle-class women who were expecting their first child. The women were in their mid to late twenties. The study was designed to interview the women at various intervals with the first interview (carried out during the later stages of pregnancy), to investigate the women's intention to return to work. The study took into consideration factors such as the make-up of each family, the characteristics of the parents and - post-natally - the characteristics of the child. The relationship between the parents, the division of labour at home, and the mother's employment environment were also added to the list of data gathering carried out in the study. A second research question, about the women's reasons for returning to work, was included in follow-up interviews with the mothers when the babies were three months old. This identified that the main factors were financial reasons, though the data showed that decisions about returning to work when babies are under twelve months may be different from the decisions made when children are older.

Vincent and Ball's (2006) large scale study of childcare choices of middle class families in London involved 101 interviews with 57 mothers, 14 fathers, 21 practitioners from care settings and 5 key figures from the local policy network. Vincent and Ball used semi-structured interviews with ten key themes to inform their field questions.

Their themes, resonated in part with the key issues I had identified for investigation in this thesis (*Figure 4.1*)

Vincent and Ball (2006) clearly had a wider intention in relation to the locality and make-up of the families, especially regarding the class practices of the families in the two suburbs within which the research was conducted. Their sample, drawn from the two areas of London, was recruited through strategically placed advertisements likely to be seen by middle class mothers (such as the '*National Child Birth Trust*' magazine) and through 'snowball' sampling where those interested in the study introduce another likely respondent, (Plummer, 2001; Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Vincent and Ball's (2001; 2006) work informed my thinking and, drawing on their studies I noted the usefulness of a snowballing strategy to identify suitable participants for my study.

The multiple methods used by, for example, Brannen and Moss (1991), Volling and Belsky (1993) and Vincent and Ball, (2006) were suited to these studies because the focus was on multiple factors aligned to social class practice, for example, the typology of family characteristics and the division of labour. Although I recognised that in conversation or interview, such subjects may come to the fore, I did not intend to prioritise them during the interviews. Volling and Belsky (1993) suggest more research is required and that a 'greater emphasis needs to be placed on a woman's *preference* to work or not to work rather than focussing strictly on her employment status' (p.10) [emphasis in the original]. Bearing this point in mind, I wanted to ensure that in my study the research questions were broad enough to allow participants to respond in a way that would include their preferences and would elicit

their views rather than designing a set of predetermined field questions in a questionnaire or predefined interview schedule (Silverman, 2007). The interview approach in this thesis, as proposed by Goodson and Sikes (2001), was 'relatively unstructured, informal conversation-type encounter' (p.28).

Leach (1997) reported on a large study designed to investigate the views of 'members of an international organization of infant mental health professionals as to the kinds of care they considered likely to be best for infants from birth to 36 months' (p.47). The initial pilot had been problematic and somewhat controversial (Leach, 1997). A minority of the 100 respondents involved were less than convinced about the honesty and integrity of the subject focus and were uneasy about the confidentiality of their responses. This stemmed from their concern that any negative results about the effects of childcare upon young children would be seen to put more pressure on women to stay at home, thereby denying them the right to choose when and if, to return to work and place their children in childcare, thus fuelling the debate about group childcare for children under twelve months.

In direct response to the concerns raised at the pilot phase, although a questionnaire was still used in the main study, it was not issued by or returned to the researcher. To ensure confidentiality was not compromised or biased, a postal questionnaire was administered by GALLUP which was seen as being a reputable national company.

'The questionnaire instructed - and reminded - respondents to:

relate your responses only to what you consider likely to be best for normal infants in terms of physical and emotional development" and to assume that all mentioned kinds of care were of high quality and available and affordable to all

(Leach 1997, p.9)



Out of a possible 904 participants in 56 countries across the world, 402 responses were received. Despite a response rate of less than half the potential participants, Leach (1997) argues that the intention of the study was not to suggest that mothers were in any way neglectful if they chose to return to work. However, as Cohen, *et al.* (2007) point out, questionnaires that only have the option to complete responses according to pre-coded questions are limiting, furthermore it is impossible to ascertain the information that led to such responses. In her discussion of the methodology, Leach (1997) refers to a number of tabulations which would have aided the reader's understanding and interpretation of the data had they been included in the paper. Although their omission did not alter the outcomes of the study, it was more difficult to make sense of the analysis of the statistics. In turn this prevented an opportunity for detailed critique of the methodology especially in relation to the reliability and validity of the data.

The representations and generalisations that can be generated in large-scale studies make them attractive to policy discussion (Lyn, 2009) for example *the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education* (EPPE) Project (Sylva, *et al.*, 2004), and the *Millennium Cohort* study (Dex and Joshi, 2004; Dex and Ward 2007). The purpose of *Families, Children and Childcare Study* (FCCC) (Sylva, *et al.* 2006) was to 'examine the short and longer-term effects of childcare on children's development between birth and school entry' (familieschildrenchildcare, 2009). The qualitative research led by Sylva, and Stein with Leach sampled 1,200 mothers in Oxford and North London who gave birth to babies between 1998-1999. Face to face interviews with the mothers took place at various intervals of the study and developmental observations and assessment tests were carried out on the children. Due to the nature

of longitudinal studies, findings and reports are generally published at various intervals of the progress of the study. Such studies can be complex in their design, and in the report of the findings (Lynn, 2009; Leach, 2009). For the purpose of this thesis the context of the larger scale *Family, Children and Childcare* study (Sylva, *et al.* 2006) is included because the smaller more detailed qualitative study by Leach, *et al.* (2006a) in which she carried out deep level interviews with a group of mothers, was a sub-project of the original *Family, Children and Childcare* study and informed by the overall sample and aspects of the methods and methodology of the larger study.

Lynn (2009) comments on the benefits of data collected and reported over time in relation to the methodology of individual studies such as the *Family, Children and Childcare* study (Sylva, *et al.* 2006) and in relation to the comparisons that can be drawn from cross-national studies (Crosby and Hawes, 2007) which compare national longitudinal studies such as the English *Millennium Cohort* study (Dex and Joshi, 2004, Dex and Ward, 2007) and the USA *Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)* (Flanagan and West, 2004; National Center for Education Statistics 2009).

A longitudinal survey is one that collects data from the same sample elements on multiple occasions over time. Such surveys are carried out in a wide variety of contexts and for a wide variety of purposes, but in many situations they have considerable analytical advantages over one-time, or cross-sectional, surveys. These advantages have been increasingly recognised and appreciated in recent years, with the result that the number of longitudinal surveys carried out has multiplied. This growth of interest has occurred in the government, academic and private sectors.

(Lynn 2009, p.1)

#### **4.3ii: *Depth not Breadth***

Vincent and Ball (2001) interviewed a group of 12 middle class mothers to investigate their choices of childcare. The directly reported views and ‘voices’ of the respondents made powerful reading.

Semi-structured interviews were also used by Vincent and Ball (2006) in their main study and proved to be a useful tool. The authors noted that ‘occasionally conversation about the children became emotive’ (p.9). In my research it was the very depth of the mothers feelings that I wanted to investigate, to somehow ‘get inside’ what they really thought about their choice of childcare and of the practitioners who cared for their children, therefore the likelihood of discussion about their children being classified as an emotive subject was one that I anticipated in my interviews. It was essential and integral to my research to be able to elicit the very essence of what I considered to be an emotive subject.

Buzzanell , *et al.* (2005) interviewed 11 mothers drawn from an overall sample of 102 women. They selected women in managerial positions who had experienced maternity leave. Buzzanell constructed a set of ‘protocol’ (p, 265) questions based on her own experience of motherhood and returning to work and then further interviews took place, mainly in the homes of the women in the study. Following the interview the authors constructed a thematic approach to analysis which identified similarities and differences in their interpretation and meaning making of the interviews.

Buzzanell’s interview schedule and thematic approach to meaning making made

sense to me. I will return to this point again in Chapter Six when I discuss the approach I took to making sense of the data in this thesis.

Leach, *et al.* (2006) designed semi-structured interviews specifically to capture the feelings of the 57 participants at an earlier point in time about their choice of non maternal childcare and subsequent arrangements for their babies under 7 months of age. The 90 minute interviews were carried out and recorded by two specialists in the field of child and adolescent psychiatry. The data was coded supported by computer generated software – *Atlas ti*. Key themes were analysed and further supported by comments from the participants. Although the main method of inquiry was by deep level interview, some peripheral details gathered from the earlier more structured interviews and questionnaire responses of the main *Family, Children and Childcare* study (Sylva, *et al.* 2006) were also used to inform the methodology. In relation to my thesis, I was interested in the way in which the combination of questions from Leach, *et al.* (2006) had drawn more than just easily tabulated and quantifiable responses from the participants. I considered the perspectives of the mothers in their own voice to be the *most* important element. Listening to and interpreting the voices of the mothers in this thesis was integral to the decision to use deep-level, open-ended life historical interviews, a methodological approach which offered me an opportunity to gather not just the words but also, as suggested by Goodson and Sikes (2001), the intent and meaning that was being conveyed.

#### **4.3iii: *Ethnography***

Life history work can often involve ethnographic approaches. I chose not to carry out an ethnographic study but it is important to acknowledge the contribution of

ethnography to studies in the field and the relationship between ethnography and life-historical studies. Buchbinder, *et al.* (2006) suggest ethnography - the study of people as they go about their every-day lives - is a particularly suitable approach to research in the field of early years and childcare because the researcher seeks to get close to the subject and to the context of the research in what the authors refer to as the micro and macro levels of childcare practice.

Ethnographic research with its roots in anthropology is distinctive in that it requires the researcher to become immersed in the lives of those that are being researched (Bloor and Wood 2006). According to Geertz (1973), ethnography requires a variety of multiple approaches and clues to make meaning to the social contexts in which humans exist and operate and therefore 'Interpretation emerges from 'thick descriptions' of cultural phenomena' (Buchbinder, *et al.*, 2006, p.47). Bloor and Wood (2006) claim an ethnographic method as a single approach does not exist, instead they propose the notion of ethnographic approaches which are invariably based on very small sample groups and include a variety of methods of data collection such as life histories, unstructured interviews, documentary evidence and observations (Bloor and Wood 2006, p.70). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest ethnographic approaches are more natural and well suited to the social sciences. The nature of ethnography is the expectation that the researcher will be more likely to decide that which constitutes data as generated by the respondent. The researcher captures the thoughts and feelings of the participant in a way that would be less likely in a larger survey style approach. Bloor and Wood (2006) suggest ethnographic studies are not intended to generalise but to gain an insight into the view of the participants to capture and be faithful to the data that are generated and to

interpret meaning. In addition, reflexivity on the part of the researcher is considered an essential component, one in which the role and position of the researcher is embraced rather than denied (Raey, 1996a, 1996b; Etherington, 2007)

Buchbinder, *et al.* (2006) claim that because the nature of the role of caring is emotionally exhausting; an ethnographic approach offers an opportunity to gather the views and feelings of the caregivers. They suggest that an 'ethnographic approach that fully integrates the outlined perspectives – caregiver, mother, child, and societal [helps us] – to understand how relationships shape the social and emotional contexts of child care' (p.57). In their view, such an approach is likely to elicit data that draw upon the notion of 'emotional labour', a term first coined by Hochschild (1983) which resonates with the work of practitioners who care for babies and young children in day care. They propose an ethnographic approach to research with mothers, to investigate the emotional perspective of the mother as she transfers the care of her child to another adult in an early years setting. They contend a dearth of literature and research exists:

Researchers tend to ask mothers about their satisfaction levels, preferences, and criteria for choosing child care... or mothers' communicative patterns with caregivers, yet these reports fail to capture the interactive social processes that shape mothers' experiences with non-parental child care....Often when mothers are presented in the literature, it is to depict them challenging caregivers' competence,... which obscures the wide range of feelings, reactions, and events that mothers truly experience  
(Buchbinder, *et al.* 2006, p51)

Uttal (1996) carried out in-depth interviews with 31 employed mothers, to determine their views about others taking care of their children in the childcare context. She identified three main interpretations of childcare: custodial, surrogate, and coordinated. Buchbinder, *et al.* (2006) suggest 'Ethnographic understandings of how

co-ordinated care is constructed and negotiated can enable childcare practitioners to develop open, trusting relationships with parents' (p.52).

My own position as a working mother, and the relationships I had formed with the babies, children and families whom I had cared for, as well as the adults who had cared for my children, fitted with the notion of using ethnography to research childcare issues as proposed by Buchbinder, *et al.* (2006). In this thesis, however, deep-level interviews such as those used by Uttal (1996) offered me an opportunity to investigate the emotions of the mothers and permit me in my role as researcher to be explicit about my position and purpose (Spradley 1979)

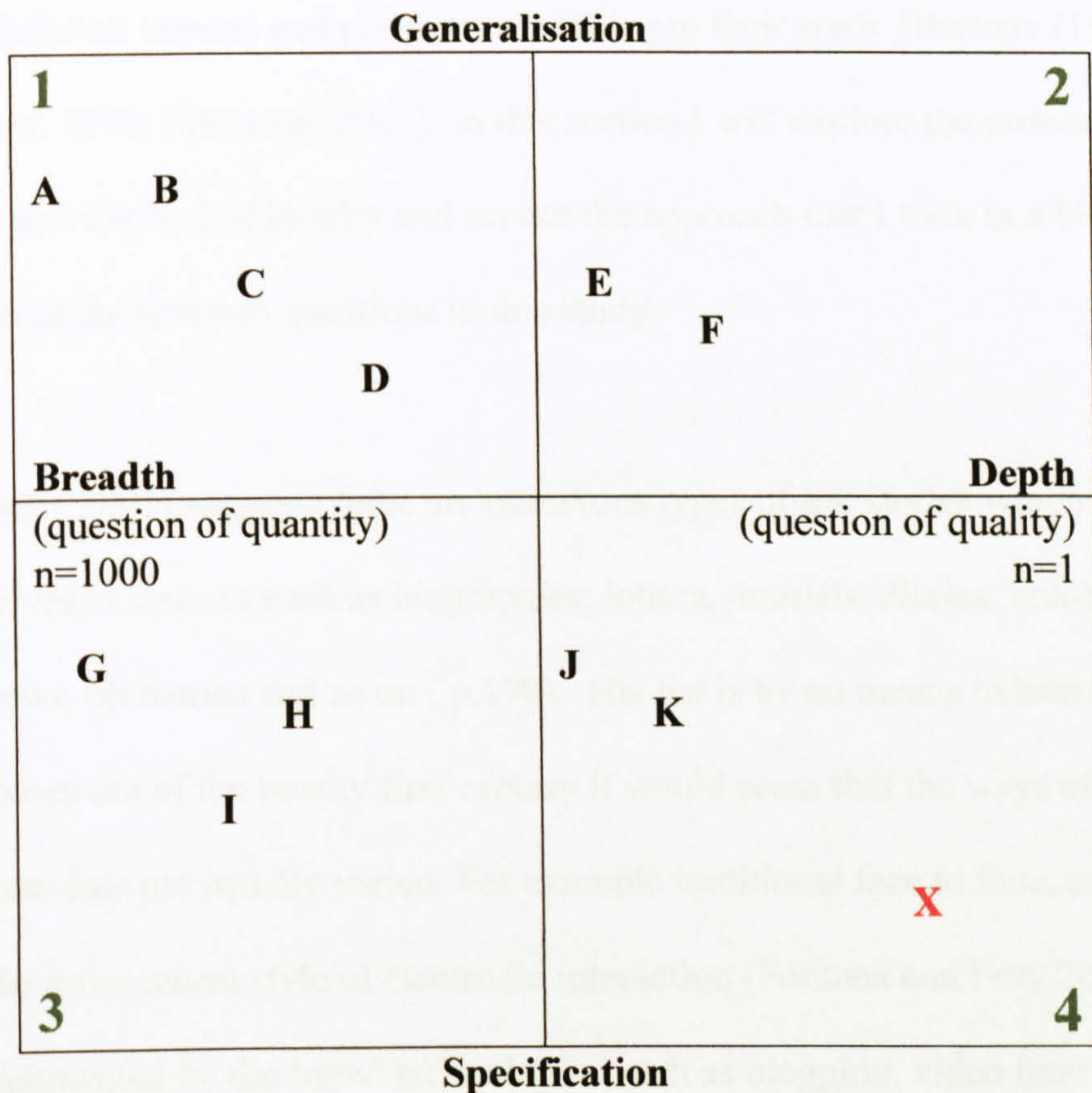
The important point here in relation to my study is the nature of the method to explore the views and position of the mothers. Buchbinder, *et al.* (2006) argue the construction of meaning attached to the interviews develops more readily within an ethnographic approach due to the way in which ethnographic understanding about childcare practice can be reached. In the context of this thesis, the work of Buchbinder, *et al.* (2006) and of Uttal (1996) lead me to focus more particularly on deep-level interviews as a preferred method. Despite the views of Bloor and Wood (2006), and of Silverman (2007), that ethnography can be considered an approach rather than a method, I was clear that, in relation to my research, I was not immersed in the participants' cultural context in the way ethnographers usually carry out their research. Therefore, my method could not be considered to be ethnographic.

However, my knowledge of early years settings did offer me the advantage of a cultural understanding of aspects of the interviews in relation to childcare practice made explicit by the participants. For example, during the interviews when there was

a reference to a routine task or an organisational perspective carried out in a setting, I had a sense of its meaning which avoided the necessity to interrupt to the flow of the conversation in order for me to check out the meaning with the participant. As Spradley (1980) points out 'Culture is an organization of things, the meaning given by people to objects, places, and activities' (p. 86). *Figure 4.2* is adapted from Clough and Nutbrown (2007) to demonstrate and justify my decision to use a life historical approach for this thesis. In cell 1 for example the *Millennium Cohort* study (Dex and Joshi, 2004) based on 18,818 children and the USA *Early Childhood Longitudinal Study - Birth Cohort* (Flanagan and West 2004, NCES, 2009) based on 10,688 children were large scale studies which offered a breadth of information and findings with the potential for generalisation. Cell 2 includes the smaller scale studies of Leach, *et al.* (2006) and Uttal (1996) both of which drew their samples from an original larger sample which came from broader studies which enabled the outcomes of their studies to give breadth and depth. Although the studies in cell 3 were still quite large studies, interviews were the main method of inquiry and therefore the depth of information was greater in relation to the specificity of the findings than those in Cell 1 which used multiple methods of inquiry. In Cell 4 the single method combined with the relatively small samples in the studies by Buzzanell, *et al.* (2005) and Vincent and Ball (2001) demonstrate the depth of findings which can emanate from small-scale qualitative research. The study reported in this thesis is located in Cell 4 because, in contrast to the breadth and generalisation of large-scale and or multiple method research studies (in Cells 1 and 2 and the larger samples in Cell 3), it prioritises depth and specificity through the richness and voices of the participants' stories. In the next section I will discuss the notion of life history as a method of inquiry for this study.



**Figure 4.2 Key Studies on Mothers, Work and Childcare plotted in relation to General/Specific and Depth/Breadth (Clough and Nutbrown 2007, p.161)**



*Key:*

<i>Cell</i>	<i>Study</i>	<i>Methodology</i>
1	A = Dex & Joshi, (2004) B = Flanagan & West (2004) C = Sylva, <i>et al.</i> (2006) D = Brannen & Moss (1991)	UK Millennium Cohort - 18,818 children USA ECLS-B - 10,688 children FCCC (1)- 1200 families 250 families
2	E = Leach, <i>et al.</i> (2006) F = Uttal (1996)	FCCC (2) - 57 interviews Interviewed 31 Mothers
3	G = Volling & Belsky (1993) H = Hock, <i>et al.</i> (1984) I = Vincent & Ball (2006)	Interviewed 164 mothers Interviewed 181 mothers Interviewed 109 interviews
4	J = Buzzanell, <i>et al.</i> (2005) K = Vincent & Ball (2001) <span style="color: red;">X = Page (2009) This thesis</span>	Interviewed 11 Mothers Interviewed 12 Mothers <span style="color: red;">Life historical interviews - 6 Mothers</span>

#### **4.4: Life history as a Method of Inquiry**

There is no single approach to life historical research and life historical researchers adopt different stances and positions according to their study (Bertaux (1981; Atkinson, 1998; Plummer, 2001). In this section I will explore the process of life history as a method of inquiry and set out the approach that I took in a bid to seek answers to the research questions in this study.

Plummer (2001) suggests there are numerous types of life stories which manifest themselves in sources such as biographies, letters, journals, diaries, autobiographies, interviews, obituaries and so on (p.190). His list is by no means exhaustive and in the modern era of the twenty first century it would seem that the ways of collecting interview data are equally varied. For example traditional face to face, telephone and even the more recent style of electronic interaction (Fontana and Frey 2005) have been augmented by the 'new' technologies such as blogging, video interviewing and instant messaging. Bertaux (1981) contends there is a difference between life history and life story and that most authors mix up the terminology of the two approaches. He suggests that researchers who collect and tell life stories do so without further historical documentations to support the life of the participant. He asserts the distinction between an oral account of a life story and a life history is that the 'life-history' includes an oral account of a 'life-story' but also takes other additional sources into account. He suggests for this reason 'life histories are usually considered far superior to life stories' (Bertaux, 1981, p. 8). Goodson and Sikes (2001) make a similar distinction and discuss the importance of locating the life story in its historical, social, economic context. Bertaux, (1981) further claims that anthropologists changed the term at a time in the nineteenth century when they had

been interpreting and editing the life stories into other data not entirely true to the oral account, thus they changed the term to life history. But in the search for truth however, he goes on to say ‘What is really at stake is the relationship between the sociologist and the people who makes his work possible by accepting to be interviewed on their life experience’ (*ibid*, p.9).

Atkinson (1998) suggests there is little difference between a life story and a life history and that they are one and the same. When planning my method of inquiry I adopted Atkinson’s (1998) definition of an approach to life history in which I wanted to offer participants the opportunity to tell their own story as they so wished.

A life story is the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another

(Atkinson 1998, p.8)

Plummer (2001) argues that life stories are complex and are subject to a variety of ‘players’. He discusses the place of those who are help to ‘jog memories’ be they friends of relatives or those who fill in the gaps when memory is not always entirely clear. He also suggests that the variables in relation to the types of life stories that exist are involved and numerous. He puts forward a list of types of life stories which he claims is by no means exhaustive but which can include such stories that might be: ‘long’, ‘short’, ‘comprehensive’, ‘topical’, ‘edited’, ‘naturalistic’, ‘researched’ and ‘reflexive’ (Plummer, 2001, p.45). He further contends it is ‘rare these days to encounter a life story that exists in one of these pure forms’ (*ibid*). The point here in relation to this thesis is that the approach that I took was undoubtedly a combination of several types. I agree with Plummer’s contention that my approach was not

'mutually exclusive' (*ibid*) rather it was an approach whereby several such definitions fused together and weaved across one another. Long life stories may take a number of interviews and be carried out over a long period of time. Five out of six of interviews were focussed and conducted over a period of two to three hours and therefore could be considered to be 'short'. However, by contrast one participant was interviewed twice over a longer period of time and indeed during each of the interviews I took an open ended approach whereby the participant led much of the discussion. All of the participants contributed additional information by completing timelines and further biographical information which Plummer (2001) denotes is when a life story is at its 'richest' (p.20). He suggests that 'short life stories are more common and very different. They are usually gathered through in-depth interviews, with open ended questionnaires, requiring gentle probes...' (p.24). In life history Plummer (2001) claims the way in which the researcher constructs questions, interprets and narrates the story of the life all have a role to play. The researcher may coax the participant to reveal aspects of their life and in retelling the story the researcher may use a reflexive account to position the story. But perhaps more importantly he suggests that:

What matters, therefore, in life history research is the facilitation of as full a subjective view as possible, not the naïve delusion that one has trapped the bedrock of truth. Given that most social science seeks to tap the 'objective,' the life history reveals, like nothing else can, the subjective realm.

(Plummer, 2001, p.20)

I will discuss the place of subjectivity and bias in life historical research in more depth later in this Chapter in section 4.5i.

The widely recognised works of the *Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) are extensively referred to in life history research (Bertaux, 1981; Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995; Muchmore, 1999; Goodson and Sikes, 2001). According to Plummer (2001) Thomas and Znaniecki's sociological study was seen as 'the finest exhibit of advanced sociological research and theoretical analysis' (p.104). In Poland, Bertaux, (1981) claims, the practice of life history has been widely and continuously used. He suggests the important point in relation to Thomas and Znaniecki is in relation to the size and depth of the study, in that it concerned the views of the individuals in society. Goodson and Sikes (2001) assert that, in relation to life history research, the Polish Peasant work was pioneering and 'established the life history as a *bona fide* research device' (p.7). Atkinson (1998) suggests anthropologists have used a methodology of life history for a long time particularly in folklore and the telling of fictional stories. Muchmore (1999) argues 'in essence, doing life history research is an interpretative endeavour, much like reading a text' (p.4). Like Plummer (2001), Muchmore (1999) agrees that when research is turned into a narrative or storied, then the reader will bring his or her own interpretation to bear.

Muchmore (1999) gives a detailed account of his attraction and exploration of a wooden box which he came across during a visit to an art gallery. The box told part of the story of someone's life through the arrangement of artefacts inside. Later in a chance meeting with the artist Muchmore (1999) explained how during his exploration of the box he had questioned and 'struggled' as he opened the doors and discovered aspects of the life of the storyteller. The artist deliberately designed and crafted the box in an intensely personal style to encourage people (in this example

the visitors to the art gallery) to ‘struggle....with the tension between wanting to explore it and feeling that it had been wrong’ (Muchmore, 1999, p.14) He was referring to the intrusion into the life of the individual – the box in this example. Atkinson (1998) points out the sacrosanct nature of revealing the personality within the life of the individual and the intensely personal nature of life story interviews. Essentially life histories focus on the lives or the stories within the lives of individuals (Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995). Throughout the process of gathering and interpreting the information shared with me by the participants, I identified with Muchmore’s (1999) notion of being party to intensely personal elements of the lives of the participants. In Chapter six, (section 6.4) I will discuss the issues and concerns I faced and how I was ‘troubled by the data’ (St Pierre, 1997)

In this thesis I carried out deep-level interviews with six mothers using a life historical approach in order to understand how they reached their decisions. I wanted to find out what had influenced their decision making. I was aware from the outset that such an approach might be likely to invite and invoke intensely personal responses from the participants particularly as I considered the topic focus to be an emotive subject. To gain the views and to somehow ‘get inside’ the reasons for their decision making was precisely why a life historical approach appealed to me as a method of inquiry for this study. In accord with Cole (1994) I sought responses to help me to develop ‘a contextualised understanding of human phenomena and experience, that is, understanding of phenomena influenced by a complex array of historical, political, societal, institutional and personal circumstances’ (Cole, 1994, p.3).

In this section I have given a brief overview of life history as a method of inquiry. In the next section I will discuss life history in more depth in relation to the approach that I took in this thesis and specifically how I designed my research for this study.

#### **4.5: Research design for this study**

I was particularly interested in mothers who had distinct and individual stories to tell and who were willing to participate in life historical interviews in which their stories would be presented in this thesis as interpreted and edited data. As Chase (2005) argues

...a narrative communicates the narrator's point of view, including why the narrative is worth telling in the first place. Thus, in addition to describing what happened, narratives also express emotions, thoughts and interpretations...'

(Chase, 2005, p.656)

Selecting suitable participants to take part in life history research can take a different approach to other sampling strategies suggests Plummer (2001). For example "Intensity sampling"- those who would provide a particular insight into the topic of research or "critical sampling" (p.133) whereby the stories of those deemed to provide key critical experiences, are two such approaches. Plummer (2001) further contends that an approach to life history sampling can be done within a clearly defined 'selective sample' or to 'stumble upon' suitable participant (*ibid*) - to come across those that would loosely fit the criteria. The participants in my study comprised former work colleagues, former students, and others I met in the course of the research. They were either handpicked, (selected) or were introduced to me by others (snowball) because they possessed the desired characteristics which were to be a working or non working mother who had at least one or more children and who had had to make and take a decision to return to work or not when her baby was under

twelve months of age...and was prepared to take part in life historical research.

Therefore, I identified and selected six mothers who represented a range of experiences, such as; age differential, profession, choice of childcare, geographical location thereby selecting the right subjects as did Bertraux (1981) in his research into the lives of bakers.

#### ***4.5i: Selecting the participants***

Plummer (2001) is emphatic about the importance of choosing the storying of the lives of others as a research method only when it suits the research question and advocates a systematic and deliberate approach to planning a suitable method.

However, in relation to selecting suitable participants he suggests a chance meeting with someone who may present as a suitable participant for life history is not an uncommon approach. In such circumstances, Plummer (2001) contends there is little point in searching for someone else if the appropriate person has been found.

Certainly in relation to this thesis I was to an extent 'surrounded' by women who were mothers. I worked in the early years sector and therefore identifying suitable participants had not been one of my earliest concerns. However, I was concerned about how best to approach likely participants who fitted the criteria: a working or non working mother who had at least one child and had to make and take a decision to return to work or not when her baby was under twelve months of age...and was prepared to take part in life historical research.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) suggest that typically 'research samples for life history are quite small' (p.22). They go on to say that it is not the quantity but the quality and richness of the data that matters most, although they suggest it is important to



include examples of what they describe as 'negative or discrepant' cases (p.23). I began by approaching a former work colleague who had regularly sought me out to chat about her new baby and the dilemmas she had faced about returning to work. She knew about my research interests and when I suggested she would make an ideal participant for my study she readily agreed. However, despite several attempts to meet to discuss the principles of the research it never came to fruition. As Plummer (2001) warns, the practicalities of where, when, how often and for how long to meet are important and vital aspects of any research but even more so with life stories. Unfortunately for personal and professional reasons my former colleague moved away and although I was disappointed that she was unable to participate in my study I was also grateful we had not begun the formal interviews. The process of identifying suitable participants had taken longer than I had anticipated. However, I persevered in my quest to select suitable, willing and *dependable* participants. In a conversation with another colleague, she suggested her daughter fitted the criteria and had offered to become a participant. Similar encounters within my day to day professional relationships revealed other likely respondents. For example, at a seminar one of the presenters who was also engaged in research and fitted the criteria demonstrated an eager interest. A former student who had recently given birth and was going through the process of deciding on her choice of childcare when she returned to work offered to become a participant. Eventually through conversations with those known to me or, by introduction, I had identified six women. Five of whom had either returned to work or were in the process of returning and one mother who had decided not to return to work (*see Table 4.3*). Atkinson (1998) suggests everyday natural occurrences can often help researchers to identify suitable participants.

As time went on and my conversations continued, several other women offered to participate in the study. However, I took the decision not to include any further participants as I was not attempting to generalise the findings of the study (Giarelli and Chambliss, 1988).

I asked each of the women to describe themselves, in their own words, in relation to their social class and ethnicity. The other features such as employment status, the ages of their child/en and their childcare arrangements were gathered during the interview process. The names of all those involved in the study were changed to protect their identity and privacy. In the next section (4.6) I will discuss the ethical aspect of choosing participant pseudonyms alongside other ethical dilemmas and issues I had to address as part of the research process of carrying out life history interviews with mothers in this study.

**Table 4.3** *Introducing the Participant's*

<b>Name of Participant</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Social Class &amp; Ethnicity as described by participant</b>	<b>Employment Status during child/ren's first 12 months of life</b>	<b>Number and Ages of children at time of interview</b>	<b>Childcare Arrangements during child/ren's first 12 months of life</b>
Lucy	Married	White British Middle Class	Part Time x 3 days per week	1 x daughter Daisy - 16 months	Childminder
Esmé	Married	White Middle Class	Stay at home mother	2 x daughter's Polly -3 years Lizzie - 9 months	Mother ( Esmé)
Amy	Married	White Rural Working Class Child to an Urban Middle Class Woman.	Part Time x 3 days per week	1 x son Sebastian - 9 months	Nanny
Martha	Married	White Working Class Child to a Rural Middle Class Woman	Full Time	1 x daughter Holly -17 years	Nursery
Becky	Single parent	White Working Class.	Part Time – variable	1 x son Jordan - 3 years	Childminder/Nursery
Ayesha	Married	Black Middle Class Mixed West Indian	Part Time x 4 days per week	1 x son Freddie- 20 months	Childminder

#### **4.6: Ethical issues**

In this section I will discuss the ethical issues associated with life history research and in particular the ethics of subjectivity and bias that relate to this thesis. I will also return to ethics again in Chapter Six when I discuss the dilemmas I faced during the process of turning the life stories of the six mothers into the interpreted narrative.

As part of the overall ethical approval process I addressed the relevant questions with regard to issues such as:

- The purpose of the study;
- The individuals or groups that might be affected by the research study;
- Why the particular person was singled out for participation;
- The time commitment;
- The benefits and/or risks - how they were to be managed;
- Voluntary participation;
- Reliability/ validity
- Confidentiality/Anonymity;
- Outcomes and Findings;

The detail appertaining to the ethical approval process is presented in appendix one.

However, the ethical issues were far reaching and gaining ethical approval was only the beginning of the ethical aspects of the research which pervaded data collection, analysis and report.

I formalised the research project by detailing in writing to each participant the explicit nature of life historical interviews; including processes for the respectful handling of sensitive information and how I intended to protect the participants from harm. I obtained informed consent and established a set of agreed principles (Graue and Walsh, 1998; BERA, 2000, 2004; Atkinson, 1998; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Plummer, 2001).

#### **4.6i: Subjectivity**

Responsible ethical research practice is far more than just the form filling exercise as required of the process oriented ethical review policy of any institution (Ellis, 2007). Professional, ethical integrity involved considering the ethical and moral dilemmas associated with researching the lives of individuals. The building and maintaining of a 'suitable' relationship between researcher and participant is one such dilemma. In respect of life historical research, Measor and Sikes (1992) contend 'it is the intimacy which raises some of the sharpest ethical questions in this kind of research' (p.210) and in addition 'the relationship between the life history 'taker' and the life history 'giver' is an artificial one (Measor and Sikes, 1992, p.214). Ellis (2007) suggests, alongside institutional ethical processes there are two other dilemmas which require further consideration. The unforeseen incidents that could occur as part of any research project such as a participant withdrawal or the need for further advice or support from an outside agency. As with any research, I was aware of the risk of participant withdrawal as indicated in the early stages of this project when a potential participant did not take part because she moved away. At the time it was not problematic but had it been further on in the project it would have altered the dimensions and findings of the study and perhaps led me to seek a further participant in the latter stages of the data collection process. Due to the nature of my topic, I addressed the issue of disclosure of abuse or the need to seek help from external agencies. I did this by documenting on the participant information sheet my willingness to seek out suitable and appropriate professional agencies such as a counsellor should the need arise. I was explicit about the participant's right to confidentiality and anonymity except where the protection of a child/ren was at stake. I made it clear that the protection of children would override every other

aspect of the research. Ethical consideration required careful thinking throughout the study from the point of identifying suitable participant's right through to writing the thesis report. Anonymity can be problematic particularly in life history as depending on aspects of the life told the person's identity (or that of members of their family, or others connected in their lives) could be revealed, albeit inadvertently. Ellis (2007) suggests that in order to protect a person, or (as in her study) to protect the identities of a whole community, an element of fictionalisation may be necessary. However, Nespor (2000) argues that when researchers engage in the practice of changing the names of people or places to protect the participant's identity can result in a change to the way in which the people (participants) and places (context) are represented. The protection of the women's identity was an important consideration to Ellis (2007). For me to reveal the identities of my participants may have prevented their involvement in my study particularly if they were to reveal personal or sensitive information that implicated others. Therefore it was more appropriate for me to change their names and those of the people in their stories. I did not want them to refrain from sharing aspects of their story for fear that significant others – friends, relations, work colleagues for example would be upset at what they may read. So in some cases changing names involved changing those of several members of their family and friends.

When I returned the transcripts to the informants for annotation and clarification I used their actual names, but at the point where I turned them into an interpreted narrative I used the pseudonyms that I had chosen for them. This became an ethical issue for me as I wanted to be sensitive in my choice of names. I used what I knew of the respondents to select a name that I, but more importantly what I thought they,

could live with. This was not an easy task for me. In fact, for a few weeks, I had referred in the narrative interpretation to '*Janeese*' but decided 'it wasn't right'. Although I was unable to articulate what was wrong I attributed it to 'tacit knowledge' (Belenky, *et al.* 1997) and so '*Janeese*' became '*Ayesha*' at the point of forwarding the narrative to the participant for her approval.

The participants were generous in their responses and although I gave them complete veto over the choice of pseudonym it was in fact only Lucy who asked me to swap '*Graham*' the name I had given to her husband to '*James*'. I was happy to comply with her wishes. She did not offer a reason nor did I seek one but I assumed that Graham did not somehow 'fit' her persona of her husband.

Following identification and agreement to participate in my research and throughout the process of interview, transcription and interpretation, I regularly returned to the list of ethical issues to justify my approach and to check I had behaved with ethical integrity. Although, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue, there is no absolute response to what is considered to be legitimate practice as our social behaviour is intensely value laden. What is acceptable to one person is not necessarily acceptable to another. In this process, I was my own gatekeeper. I had to trust myself but I had to be mindful of my own values which may be different from those of my respondents.

Etherington (2007) comments in relation to this reflexive stance:

Reflexivity is therefore a tool whereby we can include our “selves” at any stage, making transparent the values and beliefs we hold that almost certainly influence the research process and its outcomes. Reflexive research encourages us to display in our writing/conversations the interactions between ourselves and our participants from our first point of contact until we end those relationships, so that our work can be understood, not only in terms of *what* we have discovered, but *how* we have discovered it.

(Etherington 2007, p601)

Ellis (2007) suggests that relational ethics ‘a kind closely related to the ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings’, 1984), feminist ethics, and feminist communitarian ethics’ (p.4) is a challenging issue to address. Although Ellis (2007) was largely referring to her role as an ethnographic researcher, I considered relational ethics were pertinent to this thesis. In relational ethics the researcher necessarily wants to understand the participant and therefore the act of caring and reciprocity is more likely to enter into the relationship. Life history, on the other hand, reinforces the intimacy that a friendship type experience can bring, thereby thrusting relational ethics into the forefront of dilemma for the researcher in determining the appropriateness and suitability of such a relationship. Oakley (1981) was faced with this problem during her extensive research into the lives of women at the point of transition to motherhood. Oakley (1981) spent many months in the company of the women in her study, getting to know them before, during and after pregnancy. In some cases, she was even present when they gave birth. It is, she contends, virtually impossible to be objective or to be without bias in such circumstances. Though some would disagree with her, Oakley’s (1981) discussion of the traditional or masculine approach to interview is one in which she claims that the overarching aim is for the interviewer to collect data to inform the study in a distant objectified manner. Oakley (1981) suggests such an approach denies the existence of emotion and argues ‘While



everyone has feelings, our society defines cognitive, intellectual or rational dimensions of experience as superior to being emotional or sentimental'. (p.40). Gubrium and Holstein (1997) agree and argue the challenge to qualitative methods of inquiry is the neglect of emotions. Oakley (1981) instead suggests to achieve the best possible outcomes from interviews is when there is a sense of mutual trust as opposed to a hierarchical power based relationship. Measor and Sikes (1992) agree with Oakley (1981) and state 'the life history method involves developing relationships and trust, doing so enables us to penetrate several layers of access' (p.213). In keeping with the views of many life-historians (Oakley, 1981; Measor and Sikes, 1992; Atkinson, 1998; Gubrium and Holstein, 1997; Plummer, 2001; Goodson and Sikes, 2001 and Ellis, 2007) I see subjectivity as a necessary feature of life history research.

#### ***4.6ii: Bias***

Sharing information can be a powerful experience or it can make the participant feel powerless. When carrying out life history research, it is important to ensure that the participant is made aware that 'personal, private and possibly painful matters' will be revealed (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p.91). Plummer (2001) suggests that emotions and reactions can and do creep into the interactive relationship. The point here is that to dismiss or deny the existence of bias is unhelpful and indeed impossible certainly within qualitative research. But to bring bias out into the open and acknowledge its existence is a useful way in which researchers can attend to the ethical and moral dilemmas that exist. Plummer (2001) claims there are three sources of bias; those arising from: 1) the subject; 2) the researcher; 3) the subject-researcher interaction (p.155). He suggests one way in which researchers can address such ethical concerns

is by the use of a checklist (*Figure 4.3*) to identify incidence of bias. In relation to this thesis I used the checklist before, during and after each of the interviews. I found it particularly useful at the point of transcription when I listened not only to what information had been shared, but also how it had been shared and the interaction between myself and the participant. I acknowledged that in some circumstances of the interview it would have been impossible to be impartial and unresponsive.

***Figure 4.3 Plummer's (2001) Three Sources of Bias***

A brief checklist of some dimensions of 'Bias'

Source One: The Life History Informant/Participant

- Is misinformation (unintended) given?
- Has there been evasion?
- Is there evidence of direct lying and deception?
- Is a 'front' being presented?
- What may the informant 'take for granted' and hence not reveal?
- How far is the informant 'pleasing me'?
- How much has been forgotten?
- How much may be self- deception?

Source Two: The Social Science – Researcher

- Could any of the following be shaping the outcome?
- a) Attributes of researcher: age, gender, class, race etc
  - b) Demeanour of researcher: dress, speech, body language etc
  - c) Personality of researcher: : anxiety, need for approval, hostility, warmth, etc
  - d) Attitudes of researcher: religion, politics, tolerance, general assumptions
  - e) Scientific role of researcher: theory held etc ( researcher expectancy)

Source Three: The Interaction

- The joint act needs to be examined. Is bias coming from:
- a) The Physical setting – 'social space'?
  - b) The prior interaction?
  - c) Non-verbal communication?
  - d) Vocal behaviour?

Source: Plummer (2001, p.157)

I was clear from the outset that I wanted to be open, honest and respectful in my interactions with the participants. I was careful to ensure that the women knew that I wanted them to tell me their story as they wanted me to know it (Atkinson, 1998). I revealed aspects of my positionality and interest in the subject focus from the beginning, although, because I had been very open and conversational when searching for suitable participants, my particular focus was not a revelation to them, more, I would argue, a confirmation. The participants knew I came to the interview process as a working mother who had also faced decision making dilemmas about returning to work when my babies were under a year old. However, I was also eager to be viewed as a bona fide researcher and although I was excited to listen to their stories, I also wanted to convey my role as a sensitive, empathic researcher. Tierney (1998) suggests that empathy is a dangerous and 'messy term' (p.56), because essentially it conjures up a picture of those that are down at heel, and therefore immediately brings power relations to mind. However, it was not my intention to portray the respondents in any way less fortunate than me (or anyone else come to that) or that they required my sympathy. It was sensitivity and respectfulness that I wanted to portray and I was well aware that without the involvement of my participants I had no study.

Atkinson (1998) suggests that 'Life story interviews are a special breed; you will be entering into a new relationship, or a different phase of an existing relationship, and it will never be the same after the interview.' (p.36). Three of the participants were known to me in a professional capacity whilst the remaining three were identified during the research process. In some instances, regardless of whether I had a previous relationship with them or not, the participants did seek my advice or

question my attitude to their responses to the research questions; a dilemma Oakley (1981) was faced with during her research with prospective mothers. During my interviews, at times their question was based on an intensely personal aspect of the participant's story and I could only respond honestly in an ethos of mutual respect and reciprocity. For example, one of the participants was explaining a complicated element of her story about how her partner had not returned home one evening; she had later discovered his mother had supplied him with ecstasy tablets. Although she had tried not to judge others, the participant had struggled not to form a negative opinion of both her partner and his mother and was shocked by their behaviour. She questioned what sort of mother would behave in such a manner particularly when her son was the father of a newborn baby. She said to me *'what sort of example is that?'* it was difficult to be noncommittal or impartial and I responded *'absolutely'* she continued *'[they are]... that sort of family which sounds so judgemental...I don't know, what do you think? Sorry!'* to which I said *'No- of course, absolutely!'* I agree with Oakley (1981) to have glossed over her point or responded differently would have been inappropriate and quite probably impossible. I acknowledged my reflexive response and note Etherington's (2005) point when she says:

Reflexivity, although enabling the conduct of ethical relational research, also requires researchers to come from behind the protective barriers of objectivity and invite others to join with us in our learning about being a researcher as well as remaining human in our research relationships (p.599).

#### **4.7: Carrying out deep level interviews**

In this section I will discuss the process of conducting the interviews, starting and finishing the interviews and how I maintained contact throughout the study.

The interviews took place between November 2007 and July 2008. Each face to face

interview lasted between 2-4 hours and was specifically designed to be open-ended and based entirely around the two research questions I had formulated. Three of the participants were interviewed in their own homes, one at her mother's house, one at her place of work and one in a local hotel. One participant was interviewed on two occasions the other five participants were interviewed only once. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. All of the transcriptions were returned to the participants for annotation and clarification. All of the participants were invited to offer any additional information they considered relevant to the study in the time lapse between their interview and returning the transcript to me. In addition they all completed a timeline (*Figure 4.4*) which I adapted from Goodson & Sikes (2001), and Sikes (2006) to give further detailed information about themselves and their families. From the point of identification and recruitment into the research and intermittently throughout the writing up phase of the thesis I was in email contact with five of the participants and telephone contact with the remaining participant.

**Figure 4.4 Participant Timeline**

<b>Your place and year of birth</b>
<b>Your family background and history including ethnicity and religious affiliation</b> .
<b>Your parents' occupations and level of formal education; their general character and interests</b> .
<b>Your educational experience: pre-school, schooling; subjects favoured, qualifications attained or not, higher education and professional preparation</b>
<b>Your occupation: general work history; job roles and responsibilities</b>
<b>Your interests and pursuits</b>
<b>How would you describe yourself to others?</b>

Source: adapted from Goodson & Sikes (2001), Sikes (2006)

In many ways the interviews took a long time to come to fruition. From the identification of participants and their initial verbal agreement, to University ethical approval and the negotiation of times and dates to meet, took (in some cases) many months. Planning the practical aspects of the interviews became the focus to a certain extent. I was in regular contact with each participant prior to the interview either in the form of email, telephone or face to face contact. As time progressed text messages became quite a familiar way of contact with some of the participants, often instigated by them, for example, to confirm the time or location of our interview.

I was excited and slightly nervous about carrying out the interviews. Plummer (2001) suggests such emotion is not uncommon and describes his experience of carrying out interviews as 'nerve racking' (p.143). Although not expressed directly I sensed the

participants also experienced heightened anxiety. Each of the interviews took a similar approach. I turned up, we exchanged pleasantries and I was offered a cup of tea or coffee. Sometimes the child/ren were present when I arrived and were either taken by a family member into another room to play or the interview had deliberately been arranged around the sleep pattern of the child. I went through the formalities, reminded the participants about the focus of the research and my interest in *their* story. I collected their participant consent forms and tested out the audio equipment and then we settled into the interview. I explained again, my two research questions and then asked them to begin wherever they wanted to start. Atkinson (1998) suggests that preparation and planning is the key to carrying out life story interviews. I had let the participants know in advance what would be expected of them and approximately how long the interview might last. Goodson and Sikes (2001) report the difficulties of being too specific about the amount of time taking part in life history interviews may take. I had negotiated to carry out no more than three interviews of approximately one hour each. However, the decision to take longer at the first interview was negotiated at the time and suited most of the participants. This was particularly important when we reached a crucial point during the interview whereby interruption would have changed the flow. Further information was gathered following transcription and through ongoing email exchange.

I had deliberately selected a fairly unstructured style of interviewing which meant each participant could choose where to begin her story. However, as Plummer (2001) notes, it can be challenging for the participant as cues that might otherwise be found in other research styles such as semi-structured interviews are omitted. There was some initial hesitation and questions such as “where would you like me to start?” but

as the respondents began speaking, their stories started to unfold. On occasions the participant would be in mid flow and suddenly stop to say something like “do you want me to carry on?” Goodson and Sikes (2001) suggest this is normal and the informant is checking out the relevance of the information – this happened in nearly all of the interviews I conducted. I listened back to the audio recordings and returned to the ethics checklist (Plummer,2001) to examine my interaction with the participant to determine if in their attempt for clarity the informant had, as Goodson and Sikes (2001) suggest, ‘inadvertently influenced the data in their eagerness to please me’ (p.27). My aim throughout the interviews was to let the respondents take the lead. If I was to gain their views then I wanted my role to be as a listener, although I was not a counsellor (Etherington, 2005; Ellis, 2007). In the main, my responses were simple utterances – ‘yes’, ‘I see’ ‘I understand’ and such like. I interrupted only to seek clarification or to encourage further into the depth of their story. Bertaux (1981) contends ‘... a good interview, and even more so, a good life story is one in which the interviewee *takes over the control of the interview situation* and talks freely’ (p.39, emphasis in the original). As the interviews drew to a natural conclusion we once more again exchanged pleasantries. On many occasions we were both exhausted from the interview. I left the participants and promised to be in touch following the process of transcription. As many of the interviews involved a car or train journey it was during this time that I reflected upon the participant’s story as told to me during the interview. In fact it would be true to say that I was hardly able to recall my journeys back from the interviews. I found, as did Atkinson (1998), that the accounts were unusual, interesting, confirming and/or powerful (p.72). In some cases all of those points. I was struck by the enormity of the task that was ahead of me to interpret their stories both in a way that made meaning and was truthful to the



participants and informed my research. Directly following the interviews I frequently experienced a range of emotions and, as Gubrium and Holstein (1997) contend in their discussion of emotionalism, 'the goal is for researchers and their readers to virtually *feel* experiential truths...while this often implies the need for intimacy with research subjects, it also calls for researchers to reflect upon their own lives' (p,58). This reflection and emotionalist approach became a dominant theme for me. I will return to this in Chapter Six when I discuss how in relation to analysis and narrative writing I 'troubled over the data' (St Pierre, 1997).

There was a variation in the period of time lapse between carrying out the interviews and returning the transcripts in what I described as a 'raw' state to the participants. For five of the participants I explained by email and the sixth by letter the purpose of transcribing each interview verbatim, everything including pauses in sentences such as thinking aloud as well as utterances such as the 'umms' and 'ahh's'. Plummer (2001) suggests it is important to consider whether it is really necessary to include the 'faltering, mumbling and confusions of everyday talk' (p, 150). However, I wanted the participants to be reminded of what they had said in every detail and to demonstrate my ethical agreement to be faithful and respectful (Atkinson, 1998). I invited them to check the accuracy of the data and to annotate on the transcript. I also asked them to include any further information that they considered was relevant to their interview. All the responses were positive and five of them returned their annotated transcripts to clarify instances where they considered it was necessary to add meaning or expand on a particular point they had made thereby continuing to be involved in the reviewing and revising of their transcript. One participant returned the transcript with no comment, amendment or additions. Frequent comments from

the women were related to, for example, how inarticulate they considered themselves to be when speaking, a drawback I had expected when I took the decision to include their 'everyday talk'. But, as Plummer (2001) suggests, transcription is complex and whatever method is adopted can be 'problematic' (p, 150). Two of the participants gave me unprompted feedback on my interview technique which I had not expected. One participant suggested my approach had been "warm and kindly" and enabled her to feel "comfortable and relaxed". The other suggested a similar perspective commenting that I had made her feel 'at ease'. Such an approach fitted with my desire to build a rapport with the participants. All but one of the participants included further information, things that had happened since the time of the interviews. When I listened back to the audio recordings alongside the annotated transcripts I was able to re-live the interviews. This process of listening and reading prior to analysis and interpretation helped me to 'listen beyond' the narrative (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p32). Goodson and Sikes (2001) suggest that 'close listening is important because intent and meaning are conveyed as much through how things are said as through the actual words that are used' (p.33).

Following the return of the annotated transcripts, there was a period of email, telephone and text exchanges between me and the participants whilst they were completing their timelines. I was struck by how much time and effort the women put into that process and also reminded of the responsibility which I faced with regard to interpreting and making meaning from their stories. I will discuss this process in detail in Chapter Six.

#### **4.8: Summary**

In this Chapter I have given an overview of the methods and methodological approaches I employed to undertake the research for this study. I have justified my choice of research questions and explained my positionality in relation to feminist theory, essentially Noddings' (1984) feminist moral theory of ethics and care. I have discussed the methodological approaches of previous studies which focus on the themes of mothers, work and childcare concluding with a reasoned argument for my decision to apply a life historical approach to this study. I have set out in detail the research design for this study, introduced the participants and established the complex and ethical issues that faced me during the process of the study design and its early stages of data collection, how the interviews were conducted and the way in which the participants continued to be involved in the reviewing and revising of their stories.

In Chapter Five I tell each of the six women's life stories as an interpreted narrative.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **The Six Narratives**

#### **Introduction**

In this Chapter I introduce the life stories of my participants:

Story 1: *Lucy and Daisy;*

Story.2: *Esmé, Polly and Lizzie;*

Story 3: *Amy and Sebastian;*

Story 4: *Martha and Holly;*

Story 5: *Ayesha and Freddie;*

Story 6: *Becky and Jordan*

I have taken each original and ‘refashioned’ (Riessman,1993) the transcript and turned it into a story - an ‘interpreted narrative’. Polkinghorne (1995) suggests:

A story is a special type of discourse production. In a story, events and actions are drawn together into an organised whole by means of a plot. A plot is a type of conceptual scheme by which a contextual meaning of individual events can be displayed.

(Polkinghorne 1995, p.7)

The interpreted narratives are told in my voice but each one concludes with a description of the participant in her own words taken directly from her completed timeline. I was eager to continue to be ethical in my representation (Richardson, 2005) and I agree with Riessman’s (1993) contention that: ‘The challenge is to find ways of working with texts so the original narrator is not effaced, so she does not lose control over her words (p, 34). However, I acknowledge the final analysis of the work is my interpreted narrative therefore I ‘take responsibility for its truths’ (Riessman, 1993, p.67). All the participants and those featured in their life stories have had their names changed and have been re-presented with a pseudonym. All the

participants gave informed consent for the interpreted narratives to be included in this thesis.

## *Story 1*

### *Lucy and Daisy*

Lucy is in her mid forties, works part time – three days a week - and is married to James. They have one daughter Daisy aged 16 months. Lucy lived with her parents and within close proximity of the family business until age twenty-eight when she moved out to live on her own. She married James when she was thirty-six. Daisy, a much wanted addition to the family, was born when Lucy was forty something.

When Lucy is working Daisy is cared for by Maria her childminder. Lucy's career has always been in the field of early years and childcare and her decision to return to work after having her daughter had never been in question (or so she thought). James is a freelance consultant and works away from home during the week and returns at weekends. Lucy admits that she struggles with the amount of time they spend apart and feels she is virtually a 'single parent' during the week.

Lucy never hesitated about returning to work. Her workplace operated a generous maternity leave policy which she had investigated thoroughly and she planned to return in a part-time capacity. After Daisy was born, Lucy enjoyed motherhood and although time passed by quickly, she pushed the thought of childcare to the back of her mind. James left the childcare arrangements to Lucy and although he was supportive of her dilemma, he encouraged her to think about the career she had developed. Finances, he said, would be a 'little tight' if she didn't return but somehow they would manage. As time moved on Lucy knew the decision had been made, she *had* to go back. Although she had left looking for childcare right until the last minute, looking back now, she had secretly hoped it wouldn't be needed. The

homely environment offered by a childminder proved most appealing as did the notion that Daisy could socialise with a small group of children. Lucy couldn't bear to ring any of the 'strange names on a piece of paper' and had rejected the list of registered childminders sent to her from the local authority Children's Information Service. By chance her hairdresser's childminder had a vacancy for a baby. When Lucy reflected over the course of events, she questioned why she hadn't assessed the childminder's suitability to care for Daisy, instead of being caught up with the notion that the childminder should like, accept and be willing to look after Daisy and to take her on.. The situation was complex, Lucy was in a difficult position – work colleagues and even James to a certain extent, assumed she would go back to work. Other family members had never expected her to carry through her decision to return to work and thought she would change her mind. Lucy was caught in a dilemma. In the past, she would have turned to her own mother for support but Lucy's mother disapproved of her decision to return to work. Lucy was troubled by her distant relationship with her mum and was in denial about her own feelings. Despite her sense of panic, she developed a tough exterior, and 'just got on with it all'. She had feared if she took time to think about it then it would have come 'crashing down around her ears'. She had to cope – she didn't think she had a choice.

Lucy enjoyed her job and had always adopted a methodical and focussed style of working. Her philosophy to always separate work and home had served her well in the past and avoided the need for work to overspill into her home life. Her approach provided the balance she liked. At work she kept her mobile phone on for emergencies but admitted she missed the daily text messages she used to receive when Daisy first started with the childminder several months before. She had pushed

any niggles or doubts to the back of her mind and ignored the horror stories she heard from colleagues about their childcare arrangements. She didn't have to worry- all the indications from Daisy suggested she really enjoyed her time with the childminder.

Lucy hadn't cried the first time she left Daisy because she wanted to be strong and demonstrate to Daisy that everything was fine. Lucy had a real sense that Daisy would pick up on her negativity and be unhappy. But recently, Lucy had been very emotional, bursting into tears for no apparent reason. The last seven months had taken their toll on Lucy and just lately it had been the little things that had become overwhelming and distressed Lucy so much. It was the emotional effort that had been draining. She had to keep justifying her decision all the time to other people and whatever she said or did she still felt guilty. There had been a few things with the childminder that Lucy has struggled with and been unable to discuss with her in any detail. If Daisy had been at all unhappy then it would have been different. She would have found a way to discuss the issues. But it was more to do with *her* relationship with the childminder that somehow seemed more difficult to address. Lucy didn't have the luxury of unloading to James at the end of the day. She didn't know if she was overreacting. She had no one to talk to about her worries and niggles because he was away during the week. So everything fell to Lucy and the responsibility weighed heavily.

The problem was that although the childminder, Maria, was recommended to her by her friend, in reality Maria was not very experienced and therefore her knowledge of working with parents was limited. According to her Ofsted report, Maria needed to



update her training. Lucy had hoped Maria would take the lead and make suggestions about ways to do things with Daisy, and help her with some of the more challenging issues, for example, about setting boundaries for Daisy as she started to toddle and how to handle her when Daisy was less than keen to put on her coat at the end of the day. But advice from Maria was not forthcoming and Lucy as a first time mother felt uncertain and lacked confidence about how to deal with certain situations. Although Lucy hadn't 'bonded' with Maria she was pleased however, with the care and attention Daisy received from her. Her week was varied and included events such as attending a parent and toddler group, the school run and visits to the shops and the park. In effect, all the homely experiences Lucy wanted for her daughter and things that she would do herself if she were at home with Daisy. But Lucy felt that Maria was slow to communicate details about Daisy's time with her which left Lucy guessing. There was little time to talk at the beginning or end of the day, so Lucy suggested to Maria that Daisy should have a communication book to keep each other informed about Daisy. Lucy and [sometimes] James enjoyed writing about Daisy in her diary but Maria didn't fully appreciate or reciprocate with the same level of detail. Lucy tried to write in a light hearted tone in the hope that Maria would reciprocate and they could enter into a shared dialogue but it had never materialised and the approach seemed lost on Maria. On the contrary, in the early days Lucy received some 'awful texts' saying Daisy had been 'horrendous' and a 'little cow'. Lucy was shocked and upset that Maria could be so unprofessional and say such awful things about a *twelve month old baby!* But Lucy couldn't bring herself to talk to Maria about it. She said it caught her 'off guard' and although she worried about it she was so frightened that she would offend or upset Maria and that she wouldn't want to mind Daisy any more that Lucy couldn't take the risk. But the

experience had left Lucy unsure of herself as a mother and she had spent a lot of time worrying about it.

Daisy was a very happy little girl and seemed very fond of Maria. Lucy found it incredibly difficult to gauge exactly how Maria felt about her daughter but had taken comfort from Daisy's eagerness to go to Maria without any fuss. The vibes Lucy picked up from Daisy suggested she liked it at Maria's house. Lucy was pleasantly surprised when she observed the tender side to Maria - for example when Daisy was walking out of the door one day, Maria had bent down to roll her trouser leg up so that she didn't trip over. For Lucy it was these small acts of simple kindness that she took as the cues that Maria and Daisy enjoyed their relationship. There was also the time when Maria told Lucy about Daisy's nap time routine whereby after lunch she wiped Daisy's hands and face and gave her a kiss before she put her to bed. Lucy approved and had been grateful for the snippet of information that gave her a small insight into their time together. It was *that* level of detail she craved. Lucy wasn't entirely sure if she wanted Maria to 'love' Daisy. She knew she wanted her to care deeply for her daughter and to be able to tune into her individual needs. But what Lucy wanted was to know that *she* was doing okay as a mother. She found it hard to put into words why Maria's approval was so important to her. In the end it made no difference as Maria hadn't picked up on the way Lucy really felt. They had never actually discussed their relationship with each other or even Maria's relationship with Daisy. But Lucy recognised that her own relationship with Maria had become strained. Even though Daisy seemed blissfully unaware of the tension between the two women, Lucy had to make some difficult decisions

When she first met Maria, Lucy had been impressed by the tidiness of the house, the highly organised routine and the smell of homemade baking. However, since Daisy had been toddling, Lucy had questioned the appropriateness of the ultra clean environment. It didn't appear to be very child friendly and instead was rather too sterile. Lucy loved being a mum to Daisy - she had waited a long time to become a mother. It was important to Lucy for her little girl to have some of her special things from home with her at the childminder's house. But it was as though her feelings didn't matter when Maria told her that Daisy didn't need the little bag of goodies that Lucy had so carefully prepared. Maria really hadn't understood that Daisy might not need them but Lucy *needed* to bring them. Lucy interpreted this as Maria's inexperience as a childminder and her complete lack of understanding of Lucy's role as a first time mother. Lucy perceived Maria's relationship with her other minded children and their families completely differently to the one she had with Lucy and Daisy. The other child's mother worked full time and she and Maria had a very relaxed informal and friendly type of relationship. In Lucy's opinion, Maria's limited experience of working with different families contributed to her lack of understanding of Lucy's needs. The parents, moreover, the mother of her other minded children had never needed the level of support and detail that Lucy desired- it was something that was clearly alien to Maria.

Lucy invited Maria to her house to discuss Daisy's progress. She felt a bit more confident and assertive on her own territory. There had been a lot of changes at work recently and Lucy hadn't been so happy, so she deduced it might be a good time to make some changes. She knew she didn't want to leave work completely and use up all her options so, instead, she had been considering the possibility of a six month

unpaid sabbatical as a compromise. It would give her the chance to spend a bit more time with Daisy and then when they were both ready they could visit some nurseries without fear of upsetting Maria. Lucy was saddened to think that beyond her immediate nuclear family Maria was the only other adult to whom Daisy was so closely attached. However, Lucy viewed her own relationship with Maria as strained and uncomfortable and quite unlike the professional business-like arrangement she had hoped for. She was miserable and was reluctant to continue for much longer. .

Still upset about her relationship with her mother, Lucy decided to take action. It took a couple of evenings of talking things through and they both got upset but in the end Lucy was glad she had made the effort and made the first move. Her mother told her that she had been used to having Lucy around and although she was delighted for Lucy when she met and married James, suddenly her own life changed dramatically too. Not long after Lucy's wedding her mum had lost her sight; her husband died unexpectedly and to all intents and purposes it felt as if she had lost her only daughter too. Their close relationship became strained and they were distant with each other. When Daisy was born what should have been a time of joy and celebration served instead to drive a bigger wedge between them. Although Lucy knew her mother would never entirely agree with her decision to return to work at least she seemed to respect her decision and had a better understanding of how miserable at times life had been for Lucy and how utterly responsible and alone Lucy felt during the week. Even though Lucy loved, understood and respected James she had come to resent the way in which his constant coming and going disrupted their family life. During her own childhood family life had been central to all that she had been brought up to enjoy. Lucy still grieved for the loss of her father. Gradually,

Lucy and her mother started to build a different type of relationship with her father no longer there. Her mother was no longer housebound as an operation to her eyes was successful and she could see again. She regained enough confidence to look after Daisy now and again to give Lucy a bit of 'me' time and even suggested she might look after Daisy so that James and Lucy could enjoy some time on their own to enjoy being a couple again.

Lucy was pleased she had been able to move on with her relationship with her mother but she still had to resolve the doubts she had about her relationship with Maria. Lucy had written a list of things to discuss with Maria at the review. She tried to anticipate some of the points Maria might raise. She expected her to increase the fees for example. Lucy concluded if her plans worked out then the fee increase wouldn't matter for long because Daisy would be leaving. Before the meeting took place Lucy wondered how Daisy would react to Maria being in *her* home and was a bit surprised and even jealous that Daisy had chosen to sit on Maria's lap for the entire time and pretty much ignored Lucy. Undeterred, Lucy went through each point on her list and discovered all sorts of things that she didn't know about her daughter's time at the childminder's. For example, she found out the name of the parent and toddler group and that Daisy got a bit upset when Maria was called away to set or tidy up the toys at the group. Lucy was pleasantly surprised that Maria had been so willing to take on board the pro-forma she had prepared to replace the contact book. But Maria was still somewhat baffled when Lucy told her that she was 'still adjusting to being a working mum' and said 'What! Even after a year!' Lucy explained that she struggled with the responsibility of various roles she had at work and home especially with James working away all week. All in all, the outcome was

more positive than Lucy had anticipated but the whole experience made her feel emotionally drained.

Due to more changes at work, Lucy's decision to take unpaid leave had to be put 'on hold'. However, James was promoted and Lucy hoped in the long term it would offer them more options. In the meantime, she decided to carry on with her current childcare arrangements. Daisy *was* happy and that was what mattered most to Lucy. She realised that Maria would probably 'always have fixed views' but Lucy tried to spend less time worrying about it. She recently stayed with a friend who had a child of a similar age to Daisy. Whilst staying there Lucy took Daisy to a parent and toddler group and was really proud when some of the other mum's commented on Daisy's confidence when she joined in singing some familiar rhymes. 'I am so proud to be Daisy's mum' she told me 'she is such an endearing little girl, how could anyone not love her'. Lucy believed that Maria really did care for Daisy but she had to accept that her approach was different to what Lucy had expected from a professional childminder. On reflection Lucy questioned her decision to return to work and said

*If there was another time, I am sure I would do it completely different; I think I would, yeah! It's... an emotional roller coaster, that's the only thing I would say to any other Mum that's going... back to work. You don't know how you are going to be...you don't even know what's right for you. I think that's the other thing I struggled with because I thought I would know what was right for me and I actually didn't, and I just got carried away with the whole thing. Before you know it you've been back at work for two or three months and everyone's just thinking, 'well what's the big deal? so what, you're a working Mum'. You know and, you get lost in that busyness of work and....*

Anyone who meets bright, bubbly, intelligent Lucy could not fail to be impressed by her pride in her family or her work ethic. However, her smile and warm personality don't tell the whole story and instead hide the challenges and dilemmas and, at times,

the painful struggle that Lucy has faced as a working mother and the compromises she has had to make about her childcare choices for Daisy. Lucy described herself as 'loyal, with high standards, principled (to a degree!) and someone who has a desire to be organised, with a good sense of humour'. She has a 'dislike of those who lie or fabricate the truth and is not a great fan of animals!'

## *Story2*

### *Esmé, Polly and Lizzie*

Esmé is thirty eight and married to Tim, they have two children, Polly, a lively three-year-old and Lizzie, nine months. Esmé gave up her job as a Physiotherapist to be a full time stay-at-home Mum, first to Polly and now to both her daughters. Esmé is adamant about her choice to be with her girls on a full time basis but often feels she has had to justify her decision to other adults, like Tim's mother who has remarked that the children are too needy and they would be better off if they went to Nursery. Esmé doesn't agree. People have said things like 'Oh you're very lucky' when Esmé has responded to their questions about her role. To onlookers she admitted it may seem like that, but bringing up two demanding children is challenging. When they got married, although Tim had not been a high earner, they had bought a modest house based solely on his salary. Their decision had been largely to ensure Esmé would not need to return to work just to help with the mortgage repayments when they had children. Tim has since been promoted and earns a high salary. They put a great deal of thought and planning into their decision making and Esmé is clearly irritated when other people make throw away comments about their lifestyle, which she emphasises, was not down to luck but sensible planning.

Esmé had enjoyed her job as a Physiotherapist and when she became pregnant with Polly she had agonised over her decision to give up work totally. Returning to work on a part-time basis had seemed like a reasonable alternative. She had been qualified for twelve years and was in a senior position, was well respected and had really good relationships with her colleagues and with the patients. She knew she wanted to be a good mum but to give it all up would have meant that she would have to start from



the bottom again and virtually retrain if she returned to her profession after raising her family. Although there had been a lot at stake, Esmé turned to the one person she knew would give her an answer. Someone she trusted implicitly, who knew her better than she knew herself. He didn't always give her straight answers or even the ones she always wanted and sometimes she even had to ask the same question in a different way but all the same she knew God had the answer. She recalled the day she had got into the lift at Sainsbury's. She had been heavily pregnant and weighed down with several bags of shopping. She had laughed and joked with an elderly man who shared the lift and agreed about the early years being very special and how children grow up so quickly it was important to spend as much time as possible together. Esmé was certain it was God's way of answering her prayers and telling her to stay at home. In another incident Esmé recalled a conversation with a patient in intensive care she had been working with closely. The patient told Esmé that she was a 'fantastic Physio' but she also thought Esmé would make a 'fantastic mum' too. After the incident in the lift Esmé realised that she had been given the same response on two separate occasions and in her mind, God was urging her to stay at home and raise her family. Esmé has a very strong faith, she prays regularly and leads a Christian life, but because she doesn't always get the answers from God that she expects, she blames herself for not listening properly and reflects deeply about it.

Polly was born and Esmé stayed at home, she was not an easy baby and spent hours crying. Polly was not a good sleeper and Tim needed to get up for work. Esmé took Polly and went to stay with her mother at least one night a week where she took over. Tim and Esmé had assumed Polly's crying was normal but were both so exhausted and were anxious and worried when Polly had cried in agony every time she was put

down to sleep. Later on, at the suggestion of a friend, they sought the advice of a cranial osteopath and discovered Polly had a twisted diaphragm. Looking back Esmé said she felt like a 'Zombie' and is clearly quite bitter about the fraught experience of Polly's first few months. However, it was altogether different when Lizzie was born and Esmé enjoyed motherhood with Lizzie in a way that she hadn't been able to with Polly as a newborn baby. Although they have no plans for more children Esmé confessed how much she would love another opportunity to repeat the enjoyable experience she had with Lizzie.

Being with them around the clock twenty- four hours a day, seven days a week is tough and Esmé regularly meets up with a group of other mums. Contrary to popular belief, non-working mothers do not 'sit around drinking coffee all the time' she defended. It is a mixed group of working and non-working, white middle class women. Esmé finds it difficult not to assert her view when she hears the other women discussing their childcare but it all adds to her own certainty that *she* has made the right choice about being a full time stay-at-home mum. Although sometimes she does feel as if she has lost her identity, especially when Polly is demanding and she joins in yet another game of 'tag' or Lizzie is teething and a bit grizzly and is constantly wanting to be picked up. Some days, she wished she could have just five minutes to herself. On the days that Polly goes to pre-school and Lizzie is having a nap, Esmé doesn't rush around doing household chores, instead she take a little time for herself to catch up on a missed television programme, read a book or have a quiet cup of coffee. If she was at work, she would have a coffee and a lunch break but being at home full time means life is very different. She feels a bit guilty because there is always something to be done in the house, washing up, ironing or

whatever but Esmé always put the needs of the children first. She is dismissive of her friends who have told her that they have left their baby crying while they have mopped the floor. She told me she couldn't see the point of giving up work to clean the toilet. It wasn't the reason she gave up work.

Despite a two hour drive at either end of the day and a busy demanding job Tim is always home by six every evening. He likes to spend some quality time with the children before it is time for their bath and bed. Tim and Esmé have what Esmé describes as traditional roles. Esmé laughed when she told me that Tim is in awe of her ability to give up work and be at home. She said although he enjoys being a father he could never have been a stay-at-home dad, so it was never in question. They don't have much of a social life because there is no one to leave the children with. Their respective families live over an hour's drive away and Esmé doesn't feel able to call upon her friends and she has not established *that* sort of relationship with the staff at Polly's preschool. After the children have gone to bed Tim and Esmé enjoy their evening meal together and discuss the events of the day. For Esmé, this is always about the things the girls have done. She said she likes it like that and sees her identity wrapped in her role as mother to Polly and Lizzie going about their day in their 'little pod'. She told me that when the girls are older, much older, she would like to be a 'Jo Jingles' teacher. Polly and Lizzie have both enjoyed attending the Jo Jingles music classes which are part of a nationwide initiative. Each 'teacher' has a franchise and so it is like being self employed. Esmé thinks it will suit her lifestyle eventually and compliment the Brownie group she runs and the Bible class she has just recently returned to since Lizzie was born, and because both events are in the evening Tim is available to look after the girls.

I asked Esmé if she had ever considered becoming a childminder but she said it would have been defeating the object of being at home. She wanted to be available to her children *all* the time. It was her entire reason for giving up work, and the last thing she wanted was for her own children to take second place to another child. One hundred per cent was how she described it, if she couldn't give her children one hundred per cent then she thought it would be diluting the effect. She described the scenario of one of her friends who had planned to give up work but her employer had offered a financial package that was just too good to turn down so she had gone back two days a week. Esmé could understand why such parents felt the need to refer to their child's nursery as 'little school'. Esmé thinks perhaps the parent uses some sort of reverse psychology because she feels guilty about returning to work and using childcare but if she calls it 'little school' it sort of justifies their decision because eventually of course the child will *have* to go to school. Esmé is clearly amused by this and says she is so pleased that she never had the worry of having to think about a nursery or childminder and she always knows exactly where her children are and what they are doing. She said she really didn't want somebody else bringing up her children. She likes having an opportunity to chat to the other stay-at-home mums in the mothers' group. She confessed to judging the other women's decisions about childcare and although she would never voice her feelings to other friends she takes the view that working mothers are missing out on their children's development and progress especially if their children have learned something new and the parent hasn't been part of that learning. If they don't see their children all day they keep them up late and at the end of the day, once they have paid for their childcare, Esmé said she wonders if it is all worth it just to have an extra holiday or new kitchen. She thinks maybe it is different if women *have* to go back to work for financial reasons or

because a couple of days at work will make them into better mothers but if it's only to maintain a certain life style, then she said she struggles with their reasons.

According to Esmé, Polly is well grounded; Esmé is secure in the knowledge that she has shaped Polly's experience. She doesn't really know what goes on at the preschool that Polly attends as parents are not encouraged to stay. They had spent ages preparing Polly and telling her that unlike toddler group, at the preschool 'the mummies don't stay'. She said Polly would only have got confused if Esmé had hung around. Polly is very chatty and tells her mum about what she has been doing and she seems happy so Esmé is content that it is two hours well spent and Polly is making friends with children that she will eventually go to school with. Esmé considered Polly having a good vocabulary was an important step in her being able to accept a place at pre-school for her. Voicing her concern or dismay or even joy about something to Esmé would ensure she had a far greater idea of how Polly was coping, whereas for a child too young to speak, Esmé felt was far too much to expect them to cope. How would the practitioners know what the child wanted or needed? Polly likes to be given undivided attention so sometimes she does give her little sister a 'clout' or a 'shove' if she gets in her way. Esmé doesn't think there is anything except the usual sibling rivalry between them and she knows that Polly enjoys the time she spends at preschool with children of her own age because she does sometimes get frustrated having to make allowances for her baby sister.

In the past Esmé has suffered from depression and periodically it returns and she finds it difficult to motivate herself to do anything with the girls. She said after Christmas Polly got very needy which added to Esmé's stress and tiredness. Esmé

had been grateful though that she didn't need to hold down a job. She was able to avoid stressful situations such as children's birthday parties. Although she did not want to let her children down, missing a friend's social event due to her depression did not have anywhere near the same sort of impact than had she had to miss work for the same reason.

Esmé confessed she was about fourteen before it dawned on her that other children's parents weren't available during the school holidays. Both her parents had been teachers so school holidays were never a problem to Esmé and her brother. In the future a flexible job such as a Jo Jingles teacher would be ideal and if the children were ill she could just rearrange her schedule. But for now, Esmé is very happy being a stay-at-home mum. She hopes the children will look back and think she made the right decision, that she gave them time to be children. If they wanted to splash in a puddle or walk along a wall then they could because she didn't have to rush them to nursery because she had to be at work. As for someone else unrelated to her loving her children Esmé found it difficult to comment as she hadn't ever contemplated such a thought. She could imagine perhaps one of her friends having a close relationship with her daughters, so someone she knew really well loving them wasn't an idea that was abhorrent to Esmé but then again she had never imagined leaving her children in the care of strangers.

Why exactly did Esmé want to be a full time stay-at-home mum? She wanted them to be little girls for as long as possible, independent and secure and most of all to share those experiences with her. Esmé described herself as a 'Christian, loyal, and (as having) a sense of humour.'

### *Story 3*

#### *Amy and Sebastian*

Amy is thirty-five years old and hadn't intended to have children or get married. She was a staunch feminist. To a certain extent Amy despised her parents, particularly her mother for remaining in a violent marriage and settling for second best. Amy 'found' Education and has gone from being a rural working class child to an urban middle class woman. She is married to Leo and they have a baby son, Sebastian, who is looked after three days a week by a live out Nanny (share) while Amy works in the city as a researcher.

Amy and her sister had an unhappy childhood. Their father was a farm labourer and their mother worked part time carrying out household chores. In return they were paid a modest income and permitted to live in a property that belonged to the landowners. Amy described her father as being caught in a 'sense of powerlessness' which transferred into bouts of anger and resulted in domestic violence. Her parents had no aspirations or expectations for either of their daughters and were caught up in a life of drudgery. Amy knew that unless she did something about it her life would be the same. She 'buried' herself in her books partly to escape the violence and misery that permeated their life and partly to find a way out. At the time she didn't know what a feminist was, merely that she didn't want to be like her mother.

As her life and her career accelerated she had no desire to have children or get married – on the contrary. However, after meeting Leo she agreed to marriage on the basis that they would not have children. She didn't consider there was any place in her life for children. She enjoyed her job and her comfortable lifestyle, she had a

busy social network and her life as a white middle class city woman was a long way from her working class upbringing. After a while though she hated to admit it was her body clock ticking, she started to question the rationale and purpose to her life. At thirty-two Amy became pregnant. It all happened very quickly and sooner than she had predicted.

Her anxiety was partly rooted in unhappy memories of her childhood, and the fear of the abusive cycle she had been brought up in repeating itself – despite the fact that Leo was nothing like her father. She also worried about the sort of relationship she might have with a daughter. Before she knew she was having a boy she comforted herself with the notion that she could work on and perfect the type of mother-daughter relationship she had never been able to achieve with her own mother. Just as she had got used to the idea of being pregnant she was diagnosed with gestational diabetes. She had scarcely met her extended family when she was growing up and was unable to answer the series of questions posed by the team of doctors about her family history. It was not until much later that she discovered her mother had also had gestational diabetes when she had been pregnant with Amy - a fact her mother had failed to share with her. Amy was angry and hurt, still unable to talk to her mother about the way in which she found out she had been one of twins. Her brother had died at birth, a complication of the diabetes. It was never discussed and when she was eight all her mother had said was ‘oh yeah you were the greedy baby and you ate all your brother’s food so that’s why he didn’t live’. Amy was convinced the diabetes was her fault and she spent much of her pregnancy feeling guilty that she was somehow to blame and was terrified that something would happen to her baby. They were both monitored carefully and as her pregnancy progressed she coped well



with the increased doses of insulin she took. But it was difficult to regulate the diabetes entirely which meant that she had several hypos a day. It was impossible to lead a normal life and particularly in the second and third trimester she couldn't go on public transport and instead had to work from home.

Amy describes herself as a control freak, so the experience was especially difficult for her. In a bid to try to regain some control she spent time researching gestational diabetes and birth complications to the point that the patience of the medical team of health professionals was tested by her growing knowledge and 'expertise'. Seven months into the pregnancy Amy was induced because the baby had stopped moving. Sebastian was born by caesarean section and was taken to the special care baby unit. Amy's doubt in her own abilities to look after her little boy increased as the team of medical staff organised his non-stop care. Eventually she was able to take him home. The increased visits from the health visiting team convinced Amy she must have been judged as a candidate for post natal depression. All she really wanted to do was to spend time with her son with whom she could not bear to be parted.

Amy had always planned to return to work, she just hadn't worked out the finer details. They had toyed with the idea of Leo's mother helping out. But Amy's relationship with her mother-in-law was tenuous. Given that Leo had been an only grandchild, Amy hoped his grandmother might have some understanding of the mixture of emotions she was going through and how difficult it was for her to let other people invade her privacy. Sadly this was not the case and her mother-in-law, determined to have a relationship with Sebastian, whisked him out of Amy's arms when she was at her most vulnerable. Sebastian screamed for his mother - she alone

could comfort him. Although Amy was distraught she did everything to avoid a confrontation and instead hid her feelings.

After dismissing the notion of Sebastian being cared for by her mother-in-law, Amy was unsure of the type of childcare she wanted for her son. She had grave reservations about putting Sebastian in a nursery and regarded group settings for babies as institutionalised care far removed from the warm, close and interactive relationship she wanted for Sebastian. In her teens, Amy did a lot of babysitting and she became a nanny. Although she had no formal qualifications she considered it was largely her common sense and instinct that enabled her to cope with the children and in turn shaped her experience. As a nanny she had spent time with wealthy upper class families but was desperate not to repeat her parents' life of servitude. However, she recognised the importance of the position and the requirements of the individual to demonstrate a 'capacity to love and show compassion and to care for and about those children and their well-being'.

It was in a little second-hand clothes shop that Amy spotted the postcard that read 'Experienced nanny looking for nanny share...' She met Rose, interviewed her, checked out her references and after spending considerable amounts of time sitting in the corner of the house of the other child whom Rose cared for, Amy finally left Sebastian for the first time. Initially she went back to work one day a week and then gradually increased it to three days. Amy struggled with the idea of employing a member of staff and found it impossible to shake off the vivid memories of the feudal system she had grown up in. She went out of her way to ensure Rose was happy and did everything she could to ensure she felt valued. Although Rose and

Amy are the same age they could not be more different. Amy scolds herself for thinking too deeply about Rose's north London accent and if it will rub off on Sebastian. Rose doesn't have children of her own and spends her free time on the sun bed and socialising with her friends. Amy doesn't mean to judge or criticize her, especially as Sebastian "absolutely loves her. His face lights up. He waves both his arms and has a lovely time". Amy is caught between her relief about the close relationship and bond Sebastian has formed with Rose and her feelings of resentment and concern about what she sees as her being replaced in Sebastian's affection.

Leo had left the childcare arrangements to Amy although he has been actively involved in his son's care. He often did the handing over of Sebastian to Rose, partly because Amy had to leave early to get to work but also because she still found it very difficult to leave Sebastian. Initially Amy had been relieved to find someone as experienced as Rose to look after Sebastian but Rose was not forthcoming with the detailed information Amy craved. She knew that Rose took Sebastian to meet her other nanny friends and that he was mixing with older children on their trips to the park, but she didn't always know exactly where they were or what they were doing. Amy found it incredibly difficult to broach the subject with Rose. Sebastian had a minor accident during one of his frequent visits to another nanny friend's house. But when Amy received a message to let her know what had happened and that Sebastian was unharmed she knew she had to address with Rose, the lack of daily information she received. They resolved the situation and Amy continued to receive regular texts from Rose informing her about what they were doing, where they were going and with whom. It has been an emotional roller coaster ride for Amy and she was exhausted from the mixture of feelings she experienced. On the one hand, she

has a professional employer relationship with Rose - a role which has never sat well with Amy. On the other hand she has had to place an inordinate amount of trust in a woman who was ostensibly a stranger. Amy's emotions were bound up in her relief that Sebastian enjoyed a close, happy relationship with Rose which had somehow brought about informality to their adult relationship and yet the two women could hardly be described as 'friends'.

There was a point where Amy worried so much about where Rose was taking Sebastian and she thought her only option was to place him in a nursery. At least she would know where he was. She and Leo visited a private day nursery and were shocked by the limited amount of space available to the babies. She couldn't imagine how her son, who was used to wide open spaces, could possibly be happy confined in such a small room for eight or nine hours a day. The whole set up was in total contrast to the childcare arrangement she had with Rose. Amy felt railroaded into securing a place at the nursery for Sebastian (due to high demand), before she had really made a decision. In the end, it was Rose's reaction that made Amy question her decision. Rose was genuinely surprised that Amy was not easing Sebastian in gently to the nursery and instead virtually dispensing with her services one day and starting Sebastian at nursery the next. It was not what Amy wanted for her little boy at all. She had made numerous visits to the nursery and ended up telling the nursery manager about her professional role as a researcher. She was at the end of her tether and was so overcome by her anxiety about the nursery, not least by the institutionalised smell which overwhelmed her on each of her visits. Amy couldn't understand why she found it so difficult to discuss with Rose the aspects of Sebastian's care that she was unhappy about but knew that she could not contemplate

Sebastian going to what she regarded as a 'baby prison'. Racked with guilt she blamed herself for mishandling the situation and persuaded a delighted Rose to continue to nanny for Sebastian. Amy resolved in the future to tackle her concerns before they got out of hand. What she wanted, what Amy *really* wanted was not for Rose to love Sebastian in the same way that she loved him but to care for him 'in such a way that he is the most important thing in the world to her at that moment'.

Amy has a good social network of friends – she is slightly amused about the make up of the postnatal group of mothers who have experienced difficult or traumatic pregnancies or births. Amy is very hard on herself and has found 'juggling work' and family life exhausting and emotionally draining. Leo, always having been used to Amy's self confidence and her being in control, has been surprised by her outbursts or lack of conversation. He has even accused her of being 'not very nice' or of 'being in a bad mood'. Looking back at the latter stages of her pregnancy and Sebastian's traumatic birth, returning to work and study had all taken its toll much more than Amy had been prepared to accept. Simple things like going out for the evening had to be planned like a 'military operation'. Amy thought she was prepared for the practicalities of motherhood after watching her own mother and during the time that she had been a nanny and was disappointed in her ability to cope. She had been totally unprepared for the 'emotional stuff' and the way in which her life and her relationship with Leo had changed so dramatically. Sebastian was the centre of her life now, almost to the exclusion of everything and everyone else. She didn't understand it and reflected about the judgements she had made about motherhood prior to her own experience.

Amy could never see herself as a stay-at-home mother and resents the choices her own mother made. Her priority is Sebastian but she also wants him to respect her decision to work and for him to recognise both his parents as individuals with identities shaped by experiences other than just being a mother or a father. In time Amy will likely consider the prospect of group care again for Sebastian. What she has found the most difficult to deal with is the throw away comments made by other people, often those in authority whom she trusts but who undermine her confidence as a mother. She gave up breastfeeding Sebastian when he was nine months old. Not long after that he developed a rash. Amy visited the GP who ruled out measles but did, however, note the blister that had appeared on Sebastian's thumb. The GP called it 'trauma chewing'. Amy was horrified that giving up breast feeding could have caused her son such distress that he had to resort to sucking his thumb so badly he had 'injured himself'. Eventually the blisters disappeared and Amy dismissed the notion but still finds it heartbreaking to think that any decision she makes for her son, particularly with regard to her choice of childcare could cause him 'trauma'. There are days when Amy feels a failure but it is getting easier as Sebastian gets older. Motherhood, confesses Amy, has altered her life in ways that she could never have imagined. She knows her own mind and her description of herself suggests an honest reflection and uncanny accuracy to how she presents to others. I concur with her description of herself as 'feisty, determined, pragmatic, reliable, fun and analytic'.

## *Story 4*

### *Martha and Holly*

Martha is forty-five years old, is married to Connor and lives in a small village just outside London with their eighteen-year-old daughter, Holly. It is very different from where Martha and Connor had both grown up. Martha went back to work soon after Holly was born. She had only intended to return for three months to avoid having to pay back the additional maternity allowance she had received from her employer. Martha was convinced that given the same circumstances again, she would have made different choices about returning to work and wonders now what her daughter will decide to do in the future when she has children of her own.

Martha grew up on a council estate within a supportive community. Everyone knew each other and looked out for one another. Her family didn't have a lot of money and for the first few years of her life Martha, her sister Sophie and her parents all lived with her uncle and her maternal grandparents in a tiny little house with one bathroom. Looking back, Martha wonders how they coped with day to day living in such cramped conditions. Both her parents and her Nan worked full time. Her mother worked in a betting shop in a nearby town and her father worked in London as a fitter. Martha remembered being looked after by a woman who lived on their estate who they referred to as 'Auntie Tilly'. She couldn't remember her sister Sophie being there so assumed that she must have been at school. As there was only eighteen months between them Martha thinks she must have been about three and a half years old though in her mind she had seemed much younger. She was envious of her cousins whose mother didn't work and were able to spend time after school in the kitchen baking. Martha wondered why her mum had to go to work though she

couldn't recall her mother ever spending much time cooking when she was growing up or even since. She couldn't recall ever going out with her parents on day trips to the Zoo or the cinema.

She had vivid memories of family time. Even after they moved to their own house Martha recalled spending Saturday afternoon at her Nan's house with her parents and sister, her two aunties and their husbands and all the cousins. *It's what they did.*

Connor's family by contrast were completely different and his mother didn't altogether approve of Martha. She didn't think that coming from a working class family on a council estate Martha was good enough for Connor. Connor had two sisters but his parents were not happy and eventually they split up and divorced.

Connor found it impossible to connect his family experience with that of Martha's and failed to understand Martha's relationship with her family. Although they both had siblings, as Holly got older, Martha questioned their decision to have only one child.

Martha left school and applied to the social services department in one of the London boroughs to do her Nursery Nurse training. Her mother had told her that if she didn't get a place on the course then she had to either get a job or go back to school. As a backup, she applied for a job in a bank and was offered the post. Two days before she was due to start at the bank she received a letter from social services confirming her place on the NNEB programme. She took it and qualified in 1982. She really loved her job in the social services nursery. It was challenging work as many of the children and families that she worked with were deemed to be 'at risk' (of harm) but somehow this made the job even more important and rewarding compared to a



similar role in a nursery in the private, voluntary and independent sector. Over the years, Martha had to cope with a variety of challenging experiences and some of them stuck in her mind more than others. In her role as a nursery officer, Martha was encouraged to get to know the families she worked with really well and to build close attachments with the children. Nowadays the role would be in line with the term key person. She remembered a child, Paul, who had been referred because his mother had mental health problems and she had been unable to parent him properly. Paul had been left for long periods of time restrained in a harness in his pram. His muscles were all but wasted away and he was unable to sit, stand or walk. He offered no eye contact or even body language. As Martha worked intensively with the family she began to develop a relationship with them. At times, it had seemed like one step forward and two back but eventually there was a breakthrough. However, not long after social services' intervention, Paul's mother developed cancer and died. The family were devastated. Paul's father was unable to cope and the children were placed in foster care. Martha had worried about Paul and his brother in the intervening years and often wondered how they had developed. It only sought to confirm to Martha the importance of close relationships and the need to make every day meaningful. Martha never knew how long she would be working with the children and families and sometimes they just 'disappeared' almost overnight. She hoped that for children like Paul, she had somehow managed to make a small difference that would have a positive impact later on in life.

Martha recalled another child Jason, 'a tiny little scrap' who not long after leaving the nursery to begin primary school was run over and died. Martha was shocked by the way in which the officer in charge had blurted it out. Martha drove home in

floods of tears. The way that she had been told had been so unfeeling, almost as if Jason's life had no meaning since he had moved on to primary school. The worst part for Martha was when she went to the funeral. The family were so poor they could not afford a proper burial and Jason had to be buried in a shared grave. Martha was overcome with grief, not only at the loss of the little boy's life but also because she couldn't get the thought out of her mind that he was being buried with people he didn't know and it seemed so wrong.

There were other families that Martha worked with whose stories were equally harrowing, like the child covered in cigarette burns and the mother who turned up to collect her child completely drunk. The staff recognised she was not in a fit state and refused to allow her to take him home. The angry mother had thrown the toddler down onto the floor with tremendous force but because Martha's job required her to work with the whole family she had to decentre and try not to judge the adults. However, when she became pregnant with Holly her feelings changed. She found it impossible to excuse the appalling ways in which some parents treated their children, whatever the circumstances.

Martha always planned she would return to work just for three months following Holly's birth. At that time the additional maternity allowance paid out by the employer had to be returned if the mother did not go back to work. She thought twelve weeks would go by in a flash. It would, she thought, be best to return before Holly was a year old and had got too used to her mother being around all the time. About the age of six to eight months seemed to be the perfect time for them both to be parted.

She had a long labour and was exhausted. The next day the paediatrician came to carry out the usual checks on her baby when she suddenly announced she thought Holly had a heart murmur. Martha on her own and with her hormones on overdrive had gone into a state of panic. By the time Connor arrived, Martha was completely distraught. Holly was also jaundiced and had been taken off for treatment. When Connor walked into the room he had no idea where his daughter was or why his wife was in such a state. Although her GP had tried to reassure her, Martha was convinced Holly was going to die. Six weeks later, she desperately tried to stay level headed as she stood behind the screen in a lead jacket watching Holly lying on the bed with the ECG machine (almost as big as her) strapped to her tiny body.

Holly was given the all-clear and Martha thought about returning to work. She dismissed the idea of a childminder following a visit to one of the childminders from the social service list of approved childminders. The house was dirty and during her visit the children received little interaction or stimulation, least of all the baby.

Martha rang social services to make a complaint but didn't get the impression that they were really going to follow it up. Martha would have been eligible for a staff discount at her workplace nursery. However, it would have meant adding another two hours travelling to Holly's day and Martha didn't want her baby to spend long periods of time strapped in her car seat. In the end, she and Connor attended an open day at a new nursery they saw advertised in their local newspaper. The nursery was situated in the next town to where they lived. They really liked it and it seemed to have everything that Martha was looking for. She was able to drop Holly off on her way to work. Connor was working nearby, which was unusual as in the past he had to travel quite long distances to his job, and was able to collect Holly on his way

home. It seemed like the perfect solution, almost as if it was meant to happen that way. However, as the day grew ever nearer the more anxious Martha became.

Connor was very supportive and couldn't bear to see his wife so distressed. He told her to forget about returning to work and though it would be difficult financially he reassured her they would 'find the money somehow' to return to Martha's employer. Martha was torn by her emotions. She cried almost non-stop the weekend before Holly was due to start. She kept telling herself she was being silly and it was only for three months, it wasn't worth them struggling financially for the sake of twelve weeks. But the situation was complicated. Martha was unable to reconcile leaving Holly in a nursery with strangers in order for her to go to work to look after other people's children in a nursery thirty miles away. The day arrived and Martha was delighted when she awoke and saw the ground covered in thick snow. She rang the nursery expecting to hear a message on their answerphone confirming the nursery was closed and was shocked when the manager answered and told her that they were open and looking forward to seeing her and Holly.

Martha reluctantly packed Holly's bag and when Avril, the nursery manager, opened the door Martha said 'I'm not staying, I'm not leaving Holly'. Avril beckoned Martha in out of the cold and gently encouraged her to visit the baby room where they sat together talking with Florence, the baby room leader. Avril gave Martha time and space, and didn't try to rush her off to work. Gradually Martha was persuaded to leave Holly with Florence and to go to the office and have a cup of tea with Avril. Martha was adamant that if Holly had not been happy with Florence that

day and if Avril had not been able to support her in the way she did, they would have done an about-turn and left the nursery for good.

Martha had carried Holly and had struggled through the thick snow to the door of the nursery laden with bags containing her little girl's bottles and change of clothes. She had been visibly traumatised by the prospect of leaving her baby and was like 'something possessed'. She thought the nursery staff were going to try to prise Holly away from her. Looking back, Martha was convinced that Avril's gentle approach was partly because she recognised Martha's distress from first hand experience but she was also concerned for their safety as Martha had tried to back out of the door still clutching her baby in her arms. Eighteen years on, the memory of walking out of the door without Holly was still etched in her mind. A scar she felt could never be erased.

As time progressed, Holly continued to enjoy the nursery and in some ways that was the hardest part for Martha. The excuse that she was waiting for just didn't come. Holly was a happy relaxed baby. Martha was unconvinced when Connor told her that Holly was fine when he collected her at the end of the day. She avidly read Holly's contact book searching for anything that Connor might have overlooked. Martha found it difficult to justify her reasons for leaving Holly. Apart from the financial side, she questioned why she put herself through such emotional upheaval. She certainly didn't want to let her colleagues down in the social services nursery but because she also knew of the horrific home lives of some of the children with whom she worked, more importantly, she couldn't bear to let *them* down. Relationships had always been an important element of her own childhood and being on a low income

had never prevented Martha's family from giving Martha a secure loving upbringing. Martha knew that were she to suddenly disappear from the lives of the families she worked with that she would only have been adding to the anxiety and distress of the children who trusted her and to whom she had become attached.

The three months passed and Martha handed in her notice as planned. She had never entirely come to terms with 'abandoning' her own baby. The owner of the nursery Holly attended was present on the day she collected Holly from nursery and to her surprise he offered Martha a job. She refused and explained the whole point of giving up work was to spend more time with Holly. After much persuasion and deliberation Martha agreed to work for him in a part-time capacity provided she could be placed in the baby room with Holly.

The arrangement worked. Martha discovered she could genuinely empathise with the parents, especially the mothers who were faced with leaving their children for the first time to return to work. A friend of hers, Louise who lived in their village had a daughter, Arabella, the same age as Holly. She was due to start at the nursery when she was about eight months old. Martha recalled Louise telling her that she was sure her GP surgery had labelled her as a neurotic mother due to her frequent visits to the surgery with Arabella who always seemed to be poorly. The medical team had dismissed Louise's concerns until she saw a locum doctor who agreed to arrange some tests. Unfortunately, Arabella had a massive heart attack and died before the tests were ever carried out. Martha had felt compelled to visit Louise and made her way to the house but when she got to the front door she had second thoughts. As she turned away Mike, Arabella's father opened the door and welcomed her in.

Overwhelmed by the situation Martha broke down in tears. She was embarrassed that Louise and Mike ended up comforting her instead of vice versa. It was the same at the funeral. Although Martha thought they were probably still in shock she admired their strong Catholic faith which Louise told her had got them through the ordeal. Martha knew that if Holly had been taken from her she would never have been able to cope in the same way and would have felt angry at God and unable to find the emotional strength to carry on.

At the nursery, Holly had moved into the toddler room. Holly missed her mum but once settled, engaged happily with her friends. She was clingy and tearful when Martha left her and tried to seek her out. Occasionally Martha worked extra hours if the nursery were short staffed, provided she could take Holly with her. On one occasion, Martha was called into work and Holly had reluctantly joined the toddlers on an afternoon walk. On her return, Holly had slipped away from the group unnoticed by the practitioner and had gone to visit her mum in the baby room. The flustered practitioner relieved to find her escapee chastised Holly and told her she was 'very naughty'. Although later when she talked it over with Avril, Martha could understand the situation from the practitioner's perspective, at the time Martha was horrified at the outburst from her colleague. There was no excuse and for Martha no compromise, so she simply scooped Holly up in her arms and went home.

It was too much for Martha. Since Holly had moved to the toddler section, Martha had tried to discourage Holly from seeking her out which had only served to upset her and make her even more clingy. Avril reassured Martha that it was unnecessary for her to discourage Holly from going into the baby room. If she needed to be with

her mum then she could be. This policy was reinforced for all children, as it wasn't just those like Holly whose parent worked at the nursery that were affected but also some children who had strong attachments to their practitioners, so the same rules were applied for all children?

Martha confirmed that much of her practice in the nursery and in her later roles, was modelled on Avril and the philosophy and the respect she demonstrated toward the adults and children. Avril was a single parent and she understood only too well the importance of strong attachments. Martha admitted that all she ever wanted for Holly when she wasn't with her was for someone to have a really strong attachment with her. She certainly didn't feel jealous, just grateful. Because she had strong secure relationships within her family built on trust and respect, she didn't feel at all threatened. 'I think you need to be secure in yourself to know...it doesn't mean that it would take any of her love away from me' She recognised that the bond she had formed with the children she worked with, both in the social services nursery and later at Holly's nursery, was so deep and at times painful, that it could be couched as a form of love. 'Some children that I'd had a really special bond with.....it's a bit like...sort of... I feel that part of them had gone with me'

Martha said that despite the seventeen intervening years of her daughter's childhood, the memories of Holly as a baby and her transition to nursery were as clear in Martha's mind as if they were yesterday.

Holly celebrated her eighteenth birthday party at home surrounded by family and friends. It had been a wonderful occasion. A few weeks later, Martha had driven



home from the University campus where she had left her daughter. Holly as always was happy and cheerful and relaxed. Martha on the other hand was numb – she recognised only too well the sheer physical pain that gripped her whole body. She said ‘I just hope that, you know - that people love her’. Martha portrayed herself as a woman with a positive outlook on life, an attribute that has clearly helped her through some challenging times. She said ‘I am easy going, with a bright outlook on life’. She described her parents in a similar way. Martha is proud of her working class roots and although this has doubtless evolved into a more rural middle class lifestyle, the love and warmth she received from her parents has, she felt, translated into the loving relationships she has endured in her personal and professional life.

## *Story 5*

### *Ayesha and Freddie*

Ayesha is thirty eight years old. She is a well educated woman of mixed West Indian heritage. Her mother is from Jamaica and her father is from Grenada. She was brought up in a single parent household. She is motivated and ambitious in her professional life and thoroughly enjoyed her job as an early years advisor. She and her Hungarian born husband Kristoff are both Christians and share the same strong family values. Ayesha had grown up surrounded by an extended family where love and respect are central to her culture. Ayesha had always planned to return to work after the birth of her baby and was quite certain she would want him to be cared for in a homely environment. Kristoff, on the other hand, wasn't entirely convinced that a childminder was the best long term solution for his son and was keen to enrol him into a private day nursery setting. More recently, Ayesha has compromised about their childcare arrangements, especially since their son Freddie has been able to toddle around. She visited a nursery with a view to him attending three days per week provided the childminder is still willing to care for Freddie for the remainder of the week. It had not been an easy decision for Ayesha as she had always considered the childminder to play a crucial role in her son's life and has actively encouraged the childminder to build a strong, close and loving relationship with Freddie. Ayesha doesn't have the same views about practitioners in a day nursery and is anxious that Freddie, still only twenty months old, doesn't lose out on the opportunity to continue the emotional attachment he has enjoyed with the childminder which she considers is fundamental to his well being.

Ayesha meticulously planned every aspect of her pregnancy. She had particularly wanted a September baby so that she could continue her postgraduate research with minimum disruption to her studies. She knew she would return to work and her choice of childcare was influenced by her mixed West Indian family upbringing and in her professional role, the outcomes from the EPPE project. Together they confirmed her decision to place her baby with a childminder instead of in a private day nursery. Kristoff was less comfortable about the prospect of his child being cared for by one person in their own home. He voiced his concerns about child protection and his fears about Freddie having his nappy changed by a stranger. He also doubted the educative value of a childminder as opposed to a nursery environment. However, because Ayesha worked in the sector and was able to argue her position using academic research to support her point, ultimately Kristoff left the final decision-making to her. Ayesha had wanted to find someone with whom she could build up a relationship during her pregnancy. A colleague at work recommended the childminder she used for her own daughter – Molly. Ayesha trusted her colleague's judgement and the geographical location suited her route to work. She made initial contact with the childminder, Lillian, by telephone and immediately felt comfortable chatting to her and made an appointment to visit her. Lillian had warned Ayesha that she was having some building work done and the exterior of her house was not very attractive. Ayesha was shocked by her reaction to the appearance of the house both inside and out. Her own expectations were not in keeping with Lillian's standards and she recalled how she couldn't stop staring at the cream coloured hearth rug that was covered in tea stains. Ayesha was irritated as she thought about the prospect of her baby crawling over the dirty rug. At the time she had wondered why her colleague would send her child to Lillian and had been about to make an excuse to

leave when Molly started to cry. Lillian immediately turned away from Ayesha and instead gave her full attention to Molly. She picked her up, looked into her eyes and held her with care and understanding. It was *that* interaction that convinced Ayesha, Lillian was *exactly* the person she wanted to look after her baby regardless of what the environment looked like.

Ayesha kept in touch with Lillian throughout her pregnancy and then when Freddie was about three months old, Ayesha introduced him to Lillian. Kristoff would still have preferred Freddie to have gone to a private day nursery but when he met Lillian she went out of her way to reassure him and was kind and loving toward Freddie.

Ayesha was struck by the respectful relationship Lillian had with her own son and his girlfriend and it fitted with the context that she had grown up within her own family. It was traditional in Ayesha's culture to treat her elders with the utmost respect and to address all non-blood elder relatives as 'auntie' or 'uncle'. Everyone is considered to be part of one extended family and it was quite normal for a member of the community to chastise a child if necessary in the absence of the parent.

Therefore, the opportunity for Freddie to experience family life with the childminder was a chance for him to be surrounded by positive role models. Ayesha had to make some compromises - for example she decided that Lillian's warm, caring and naturally open personality was more important to her than an Ofsted grade of 'good' or 'outstanding'. This was a surprise to Ayesha at first as high standards and indicators of quality had always been at the top of her childcare agenda both personally and professionally. But overwhelmingly, it was the rapport Lillian had with Freddie that far outweighed Ayesha's usual professional code.

Ayesha wanted an intimate family set up and she most definitely wanted someone to love her baby. She was not at all troubled by the use of the word 'love' or 'intimacy' unlike some of her work colleagues who shied away from such phrases. But Ayesha was quite clear about the fact that she wanted her childminder to form a strong emotional bond with Freddie including embracing and kissing him. She didn't feel anxious or replaced in his affections because she considered there was room for both of them. Ayesha considered she was a very confident mother and by forming a strong relationship with Lillian, she was affirming and modelling to her son that she approved and permitted the attachment between Freddie and Lillian. However, Freddie had been a little slower than average about starting to walk and it was the only time that Ayesha anticipated she might feel jealous of Lillian. She asked Lillian not to tell her if Freddie took his first steps at her house. Ayesha had shared all his first experiences. She had been the first person to see him when he was born, hold him, feed him, wean him and so on – she definitely wanted to be the first one to see him take his first steps. Looking back she didn't really know if *she* was the first to see him walk but Lillian was prepared to say nothing and instead supported Ayesha by respecting her wishes. The emotional sensitivity that Lillian demonstrated toward Ayesha was a crucial factor in their relationship and helped to nurture a shared understanding of trust and respect.

Ayesha's Christian upbringing complemented her mixed West Indian family values. Moreover, the two together enabled her to have a distinct and unique understanding of the place of love in relationships with other people outside of her immediate family. She used the term 'Agape' love to define friendship love which she confirmed was different to 'Eros' or sexual love. Being clear about the two

definitions enabled Ayesha to speak openly of love and indeed intimacy and the importance of the spiritual definition of love as agape and for it not to become confused or tainted by sexual or Eros love. Ayesha has been brought up to be openly demonstrative toward others in the spirit of agape love and it was completely natural for her to want to surround her son with the same type of experiences and to feel confident about the loving relationships he established with others. In fact anything less would have been an insult to Ayesha's culture and tradition. It was a conversation that Ayesha had with Kristoff and, although he didn't completely understand it, he came to accept it more easily than he did in the beginning, especially the aspect of Lillian kissing Freddie, although he made it clear he didn't want Lillian to kiss Freddie on the lips. Ayesha struggled to articulate why it would be different for her in a day nursery setting but she was adamant that she would not want the practitioners to kiss Freddie – not even his key person. She viewed the nursery setting quite differently and thought the term 'professional love' could potentially be used to determine a close attachment between a practitioner and a child but she was, however, unable to associate and accept the same level of intimacy and love that Freddie might receive in a day nursery from his key person with what he received from the childminder. Ayesha knew that to term the love between Lillian and Freddie as professional love would be in her view prohibitive and place unnecessary artificial barriers, whereas in the nursery it seemed to fit the institutionalised environment and to a certain extent depersonalise the love in a way that was more clinical and for some reason more acceptable.

Ayesha was slightly troubled by the contrast in her reaction toward the two childcare settings. She knew from the start that she had wanted the childminder to become a

significant secondary figure for Freddie and had actively encouraged her in the role almost as a substitute mother, but she was completely opposed to such a notion in a day nursery. It was impossible for Ayesha to even conjure up the image of the practitioner taking on such a significant role with Freddie and she loathed the thought of anyone else kissing him. Ayesha recognised that in her professional role she encouraged practitioners to be intimate and loving but confirmed that in her experience sometimes practitioners got caught up in policies and procedures and applied child protection guidelines inappropriately. She described two extreme examples of misinterpretation. In the first example, a practitioner refused to apply sun cream to a baby for fear of reprisal and in the second example, Ayesha described how she had been working regularly with a day nursery setting and had got to know the children quite well. One of the practitioners approached Ayesha with a child who had expressed a desire to kiss her; Ayesha didn't altogether feel comfortable but not wishing to reject the child offered her cheek up to her. The practitioner looked surprised and declared their nursery policy was to 'kiss children on the lips!' Ayesha sensitively challenged the practice, as clearly there had been a misunderstanding. However, she confirmed the complexity involved in intimate relationships between adults and children, and particularly with inexperienced practitioners and young children. On the one hand, she considered children may be starved of affection because practitioners set ridiculous policies in place and on the other hand, they might overstep the mark and treat the children inappropriately based on their own background and experiences. Ayesha's relationship with Lillian had been clear from the start and Lillian had some twenty-six years experience of childminding, working with children and families of varying cultures and with different expectations. If in the future, Freddie struck up a bond with a practitioner in the nursery, Ayesha would

see it as a bonus but with Lillian it has been her express wish and expectation from the very start, hence her decision to begin her relationship with Lillian prior to Freddie's birth and plan a graduated admission.

Ayesha and Kristoff planned to have a second baby in the next twelve to twenty-four months and despite continued pressure from Kristoff to pursue a day nursery place for Freddie, Ayesha is determined Lillian will care for her second child. She admitted that there have been times when she had been frustrated because Lillian hadn't provided more interesting and stimulating experiences for Freddie, so her solution had been to present Lillian with a range of materials to offer all the children she minds. Lillian accepted and used the items with the children but it had continued to be a constant source of friction between Ayesha and Kristoff., particularly as their friends and Kristoff's work colleagues have challenged their choice of childcare and Kristoff's concern that childminders are somehow inferior to private day nurseries. This is a notion exacerbated by Ayesha's mother who is the same age as Lillian and has expressed her jealousy that her grandson is cared for by a stranger when she could look after him equally well, if not better. This has, at times, proved awkward for Ayesha. When Freddie was first born Ayesha's mother looked after him to enable Ayesha to complete her degree. Ayesha and Kristoff had briefly considered the possibility of Ayesha's mother caring for Freddie when Ayesha returned to work but dismissed the notion as they preferred to have a professional, albeit intimate, arrangement for Freddie. Unfortunately, neither Ayesha's mother, nor indeed Ayesha's elder brother, had quite come to terms with her choice of childcare and although Ayesha enjoyed a good relationship with her family, there were times when she had to stand up to them.



Ayesha always hoped that Freddie would eventually rush to see Lillian and be more open with her. However, he is a reserved child and instead takes his time to part from his mum. Ayesha saw it as a triumph and a signal that Freddie had really settled the day that she had returned to collect him and he had protested. However, there were a couple of incidents that Ayesha has struggled to deal with. She had made it quite clear to Lillian that she didn't want Freddie to be given sweet things to eat. On one occasion she turned up early to collect him, to discover he was eating a biscuit. She didn't say anything at the time but was angry with herself for the rest of the evening. She decided the best approach was to compromise and give Lillian an alternative low sugar biscuit to offer to Freddie instead. Kristoff was unhappy and didn't want to compromise and so he had tackled the situation with Lillian which Ayesha didn't like. She knew that Lillian would never take offence or treat Freddie any differently but Ayesha is keen not to upset her and to be flexible. Yet, she considered, should a similar situation occur in a day nursery she would tackle it differently. Her expectation would be entirely different. Ayesha was confident that Lillian wasn't deliberately ignoring her wishes and it was more likely that she didn't want Freddie to feel left out when the other children had a biscuit. It was a grey area for Ayesha as Lillian is what she would describe as 'old school'. Her attitude was along the lines of 'it never did my children any harm.' Lillian always changed Freddie's nappy on her lap and occasionally Ayesha noticed when she got home that his body suit was slightly soiled. Ayesha has had to take a flexible approach. Although she was upset the first time it happened she was also confident Freddie hadn't been neglected,. It was, she decided, an oversight and a minor point. It was different to the way she did

things but it was a small price to pay for the luxury of the close relationship between Freddie and Lillian.

Ayesha had dreaded telling Lillian about their plan to send Freddie to a nursery three days a week. Kristoff, on the other hand, could hardly wait and wanted to tell the childminder that he didn't think she had stimulated Freddie sufficiently and the time had come to educate him! Ayesha was frustrated that Kristoff was unable to see how much Lillian had stimulated Freddie in her own way. She wanted to ensure that Lillian knew how much they valued her.

In some ways Ayesha was cross with herself for not insisting that Lillian completed a 'learning journey' or had gathered similar documentary evidence to prove to Kristoff the things that Freddie had learned. Ayesha had been more than content with the daily contact book and the regular phone conversations she and Lillian regularly shared. Eventually Ayesha summoned up the courage to talk to Lillian and informed her that Freddie would be taking up a place at a nursery. She and Kristoff had planned to see Lillian together but in the end he had been unable to attend the meeting. They had an open and honest discussion and Ayesha told Lillian how much they valued her and that they hoped she would be prepared to look after baby number two. Lillian was apprehensive at first as she had thought Ayesha was going to terminate her contract completely. Ayesha was concerned about Lillian. She knew she was losing a significant amount of her income and might be unprepared to continue to caring for Freddie on a part-time basis.

Lillian ran a parent and toddler group. It had been one of the things that had attracted Ayesha to Lillian; she was keen for Freddie to socialise with his peers.

Unfortunately, he hadn't always coped well in the group situation. Lillian shared her concern about Freddie attending a nursery that was unfamiliar to him and she had requested the weekend to think over her position. Ayesha was relieved to receive a call from Lillian on the Monday morning to confirm her willingness to continue looking after Freddie two days per week. She requested he continue to go to her on a Monday and Tuesday so that she could take him to the group and he could carry on mixing with his peers who would eventually be his companions at primary school. She also requested an opportunity to visit Freddie's new nursery so that she could help him with his transition. Lillian confirmed she only wanted what was best for Freddie.

Recently they have started to work on a transition treasure basket from home and Lillian's, for Freddie to take with him to nursery. They have arranged a nursery visit and have planned to take photographs so that Freddie and his friend Molly can both have a visual timetable so that they each know where the other is when they are not all together at the childminder's. It will be different for them all when they are away from each other.

Ayesha describes herself as having a 'strong thirst for life and anything new'. She said she was 'creative, hard working, ambitious, honest, open, and enthusiastic, with a dry sense of humour'. All of these attributes Ayesha poured into her role as a mother and as a professional, but also in the voluntary roles she undertook which fostered her strong sense of community.

## ***Story 6***

### ***Becky and Jordan***

Becky is thirty three years old. She is a strong determined woman who has had to cope with a series of challenging domestic circumstances from a very young age. Following several years in unsatisfactory long term relationships she has separated from the father of her three year old son Jordan, and is a self sufficient single parent with strong views about how her son is raised, and *her* role in shaping and moulding his character. Jordan attends nursery four days a week while Becky is at work and one day is allocated to spend with his father – Mike. His interest in his son has been sporadic and inconsistent. Whether Mike looks after Jordan or not has often depended on his particular mood on the day which has meant Becky has been unable to rely on him.

Becky did not have a happy childhood. Her father worked on the ferries and was a typical ‘working men’s club’ type of man. Becky regularly witnessed him physically abuse her mother when he returned home drunk from the pub. When Becky was eleven her parents divorced but at the time she didn’t fully appreciate why her father had to leave the family home. Although he had never hit her she had grown up knowing he was an alcoholic and assumed that domestic violence was ‘normal’. Unlike her four-year-old severely disabled sister, she continued her relationship with her father until she was about thirteen when the realisation of her parents’ turbulent relationship became clearer to her.

Becky’s mother entered into another disastrous relationship. The man that became Becky’s step-father was a serial adulterer and was in and out of prison for credit card

fraud. Like her father he had an equally violent temper. Becky's mother struggled to cope with the strain of looking after her physically disabled daughter twenty-four hours a day and coupled with the physical and mental abuse from her partner – she too became an alcoholic. She waited until her youngest daughter was in bed before she opened her daily bottles of wine but the heavy drinking added to her deep depression. One evening during a drinking binge she cut her wrists and in desperation she rang the Samaritans. The paramedics had to break the door down to get in but Becky's mother refused to go to hospital for fear that social services would declare her an unfit mother and take her young disabled daughter into care. Even though she was only eighteen it was Becky that ended up having to dress her mother's wounds. Her mother was so shocked and ashamed of the effect of her suicide attempt and the burden it had placed on Becky that she sought help. Several years later Becky was relieved and pleased that her mother married the man who had been her 'sponsor' for Alcoholics Anonymous. He also idolised her and doted on Becky's sister.

Despite her turbulent childhood Becky attended the local comprehensive school regularly. Like many of her friends Becky had lots of boyfriends, dyed her hair and pierced her body. She left school and went to college to study for her A' levels but she discovered marijuana which meant she was 'stoned' most of the time. Her Sociology and Psychology results at 'D' and 'E' were not sufficient grades for her to get into University. She had a series of 'dead end' jobs, drank a lot, and took a lot of drugs - mainly 'pot' and 'speed' (marijuana and amphetamines) but never ecstasy. She got into the wrong scene and mixed with the wrong people. Though looking back she considered she was one of the lucky ones, it didn't last long and she

eventually got out of it. Becky had grown up acutely aware of the special needs of her disabled sister and in her teenage years had worked at weekends in an old people's home. Although it was poorly paid Becky knew it was something that she was good at and she could always get work.

When she was nineteen she got pregnant and had a miscarriage. Looking back she knows now she was not ready to have a baby. She could barely look after her own needs. However, it was so unexpected and Becky found it very difficult to handle the miscarriage and sank into deep depression. After three months sick leave the Prozac she was prescribed had eased the depression and the counselling had helped Becky to deal with some of the issues from her childhood. Her partner at the time was hopeless with money – they moved five times leaving a trail of unpaid debts behind them. In the end Becky took over their finances - it was the only way she could be sure the bills were paid and they had a roof over their heads. Their relationship broke down not long after Becky had given up her friends and family to move with her partner to London. After a period of uncertainty, she eventually moved to be near a friend in the South. It was not dissimilar to the dockyard area in which she had grown up and for about three months she worked with disaffected adults in a psychiatric hospital. Eventually she returned home, and after initially living with her mother she rented a room and enrolled on a midwifery degree programme at University. She had reached the conclusion that if she was to remain in the caring industry she needed to gain a qualification so that she could earn a decent salary. Just before the start of the academic year she started working at the job centre to earn some extra cash. She hadn't worked in an office before but quite enjoyed it. While she was there she saw a job advertised for an assistant with a local firm of

solicitors- the money was too good to turn down so when she was appointed she decided to defer her midwifery placement for a few more months. She was a bright intelligent woman and capable of carrying out some aspects of the role even without the necessary credentials. However, Becky didn't altogether trust her employer and knew his practice only kept him 'just within the law'. She eventually moved on to work for a more reputable firm of solicitors who encouraged and funded her to gain the necessary qualifications. She decided to give up her University placement altogether as the twenty-five thousand pounds salary per year was more than she was likely to earn as a fully qualified midwife.

Becky lost contact with her father but decided to visit him when she heard he had suffered a heart attack. By then he was out of work and claiming sick benefit which he then spent in the pub. Becky enjoyed seeing her dad again and on her way home from work she joined him for a beer or two in the pub which is where she met Mike. Looking back it is difficult for Becky to understand what it was about the dockland culture that she so readily accepted, especially as Mike was in many ways *exactly* like her father. Becky moved in with Mike but after two weeks decided it wasn't what she wanted and went to live with a friend. Mike turned up at the house drunk at two in the morning. He dragged Becky out of the house by her hair through the glass window of the front door. He was eventually prosecuted for breaking the door but not for the attack on Becky. Looking back she assumed she must have loved him - it seemed to her to be the only explanation for protecting him. Yet she had seen what her father had been capable of during his drunken rages and it seemed that Mike was a carbon copy of him. Against the advice of her friends and family Becky started to see Mike again. He managed to convince her that he had changed and bombarded her

with 'I love you' texts. She had managed to save enough money to rent her own house and two weeks after moving in Mike moved in with her.

Like her previous partners Mike was also not good with money. He ran up debts and withdrew money from their joint account which meant that Becky had to constantly replace it. But finances aside, everything else was fine and life seemed to be working out. However, Becky was getting older and really wanted a baby. Mike agreed to the idea of starting a family and three weeks after having her coil removed Becky became pregnant. Mike never knew his dad and his mother gave birth to him when she was fourteen so Mike had never experienced family life. He carried on his routine of going to the pub but Becky had given up the drinking culture as soon as she found out she was expecting a baby. Mike continued to get drunk and he had 'shoved' Becky a couple of times..

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Becky gave birth to Jordan by Caesarean section and within two hours of them both being home from hospital Mike went down the pub to 'wet the baby's head'. When Jordan was a couple of months old Mike went to see his mother and didn't return until the next morning. Becky was shocked and furious with them both when she discovered his mother had given him ecstasy tablets! His mother had never set him any sort of example but she was appalled at them both for their irresponsible behaviour given that he was a new father. In the early hours of Christmas Eve, Mike had come home in a drunken stupor. He was falling about and picked Jordan up out of his Moses basket. Becky not knowing what he would do next knew she needed to persuade Mike to give her the baby. Although she managed to get Jordan to safety she still bears the physical scars on her shins of where he roughly pushed her across



the room. On another occasion Becky discovered Mike standing over Jordan's cot about to urinate on him, too drunk to realise he was in the baby's bedroom and not the bathroom. To a certain extent Becky blamed herself for Mike's behaviour – she doesn't think she can have been very easy to live with. She was obsessive about order and coupled with Mike getting used to being a new father put a strain on their relationship, even though Becky knew the drink was mainly responsible. It took him over and he lost all sense of purpose. He would shout, grab, shove, hair pull and threaten to push Becky down the stairs. The following day he was always remorseful and for a few days after he would try really hard to make it up to Becky. He even gave up the drink but he couldn't keep it up and he would soon be back to his old ways and to the pub. Becky knew that Jordan was witnessing similar scenarios to those she had seen of her father – though at the time she rationalised it because Mike had never physically punched her and she knew it was the alcohol that made him behave so violently. His fiery temper would flare quickly and Becky would beg him to 'wait until Jordan was in bed!' When he was sober Mike was a real gentleman and enjoyed being with Becky and Jordan but as soon as he had a drink his personality changed

Becky stopped seeing her father about the time Jordan was born. Her priorities had changed and she didn't want Jordan exposed to her father's ranting. The turning point came when Mike was prosecuted for assaulting a man with an ashtray in the pub. Becky had lost all respect for Mike but because he was the father of her son agreed to let him sleep on the sofa until he had paid his fine. However, Mike continued to take money from their joint account until Becky realised he had withdrawn all the money she had saved and there was nothing left to pay the rent.

She was so angry she drove to the pub with Jordan in the back of the car. They had a fierce argument which resulted in Becky slapping Mike across the face. He retaliated and threw her to the floor. She felt guilty and was ashamed she had allowed herself to lose her temper in front of Jordan. She moved house again but each time Mike found her and the police were regularly called to the scenes of domestic violence as he kicked the door down and threatened to fire bomb the car of her new boyfriend.

Regardless of what happened, Becky has always tried to maintain the relationship between Mike and Jordan. She didn't want Jordan to accuse her later of keeping them apart. However, contact between father and son had always depended on Mike's moods and his visits were spasmodic. Often, they would only take place if his mother, a reformed character, was available to share the care. Jordan didn't always want to leave Becky and would sometimes cling to her legs but later when she spoke to him on the phone he was fine and told her about the things he and his daddy had done together.

Becky had always known she would return to work. Following Jordan's birth she took four months maternity leave and went back to her job five afternoons a week. Mike worked in the mornings and looked after Jordan in the afternoon. The arrangement worked well for the first three months. When Jordan was about seven months old Mike had got restless and increasingly unreliable. He claimed he was needed at work but in reality Becky knew it had been just an excuse to go to the pub. Becky found a registered childminder – it was cheaper than a nursery and Becky increased her hours at work to three days per week in order to pay for reliable childcare. She hadn't been altogether comfortable with the one to one relationship

Jordan had with the childminder and somehow she had felt replaced in her son's affections. Becky felt guilty about going back to work and she hadn't liked the idea that someone else was raising her child – she thought that if he was in the home with one adult then it should be *her* home with *her* and not with someone else in *their* home. Jordan was under a year at the time and on reflection, Becky thought he probably benefited from what she described as a 'motherly' role but she didn't like it because she felt excluded. By the time Jordan reached his first birthday, Becky had decided she couldn't handle the thought of him becoming attached to another person any longer and determined he was old enough to go to nursery. On the advice of a friend who worked in the early years' field she found a nursery that she liked and enrolled Jordan. Becky was really happy with the arrangement and Jordan settled quickly. She said he loved it and the staff were brilliant, Becky trusted them and even went out with one or two of them socially. Becky was confident Jordan was well cared for but she still felt in control, and able to make the childrearing decisions about her son. Jordan's daily communication book served as an invaluable source of contact and kept Becky up to date with the detail she craved when she was away from Jordan. She approved of the busy atmosphere in the nursery that combined the care with routine and structure. Becky hadn't felt threatened when Jordan declared he 'loved' Leah or Sally. She was pleased he was fond of the staff and if they reciprocated that was fine too. The notion that the staff returned home to their own families at the end of the day seemed to be more acceptable than the home care environment of the childminder which had undermined Becky as a mother. Her relationship with the nursery practitioners was such that Jordan had even stayed over at the house of one of them when Becky went to a wedding that involved an overnight stay. Sally had two children of her own and Jordan got on well with them.

It was not the sort of practice encouraged by the nursery but with sporadic support from Mike and no one else to help with childcare it had proved to be the perfect solution at the time. Becky thought of the practitioners more like friends and aunts. Therefore, because Becky had become friends with Sally, it was acceptable for Jordan to 'love' one of her friends and for it to be reciprocated. Becky struggled to articulate exactly what she meant but she felt happy to think someone else might love her son as long as it did not replicate or threaten her relationship with Jordan in any way – it was complex. Becky wanted it *only to be her* who shaped Jordan's experiences. When Jordan learned a new word or concept that she had not specifically taught him she always found it difficult to accept. However, she comforted herself with the knowledge that she made the childcare decisions, about the things Jordan ate, what time he went to bed, who he played with and the television programmes he watched. Routine and structure and their mother-son relationship have always been Becky's top priority.

Jordan has not proved to be quite as gregarious as his mother. He takes his time to weigh up a situation and has not developed the confidence that Becky had hoped he would. Looking back, she worried that his early experiences could have been a factor or that she may have expected too much of him. The guilt of being both a working mother and a single parent are subjects she has regularly discussed with her own mother during her visits. Jordan is nervous of his disabled aunt and has found it difficult to understand her behaviour. This has meant that apart from the odd evening out when she has had a babysitter Becky has no support system in place. Mike has always been unreliable. He even refused to look after Jordan when Becky had an operation for a ruptured appendix. With no one to turn to she discharged herself from

hospital and returned home. The physical pain she was in at the time still haunts her but Becky doesn't want to be pitied. On the contrary, drawing on words from her mother she said *she* chose to have a baby and be a working mother so *she* has to work it all out. Becky loves her job and loves her son but when it comes to a choice there was no contest. Becky needed to further her qualifications if she was to continue working at the solicitors. The law had changed and Becky knew only too well that unless she was able to complete the week-long course and pass her exams it was likely her job would end in redundancy. She was philosophical and commended her employers for their equal opportunity policy – she knew it was nothing personal. She had no one to help her. She couldn't have left Jordan for a week. There was no one to ask. In some ways she thought the decision had been made about her job. Her employer were very supportive – they were prepared to give her the time off, pay her salary and fund her exams but without any one to care for Jordan she was completely trapped. Becky's positivity, determination and resilience were astounding; she remained optimistic and had even started to plan her options if things didn't work out. She coped. Mike had been in a good mood recently. Becky had been looking forward to Saturday - he had agreed to accompany her and Jordan on a shopping trip to buy their son some new shoes. Becky knew he might change his mind at the last minute and cancel but she knew he was unreliable. She said 'Life's what you make it. Its shit but you've just got to try and make the right choices'. Becky had undoubtedly worked hard at her career to become a respected lawyer for a well known charity, and also took her role as mother to Jordan very responsibly. She was keen to ensure he had fun and laughter and security in his life and she enjoyed nothing more than taking him out for an 'adventure' on their bikes with a pack up and a warm coat. Becky's greatest ambition was to have a happy, fulfilled life with

lots of people she loves and she said she was ‘very nearly there!’ Becky described herself to others as an ‘optimistic, driven, funny, intelligent well rounded woman who takes life a little too seriously and plans to be more spontaneous!’

### **Summary**

In this Chapter Five I have re-presented the life stories of the six participant mothers as interpreted narratives. Each one has been told in my voice and constitutes a level of analysis; being interpreted from the original and ‘refashioned’ (Riessman, 1993) transcripts as a result of conducting deep level interviews with each of the six women. The process for analysis and the approaches I took to arrive at the interpreted narrative as part of a four staged process to meaning- making are discussed in detail in Chapter six – Analysis and Interpretations.